The New Criterion

June 2001

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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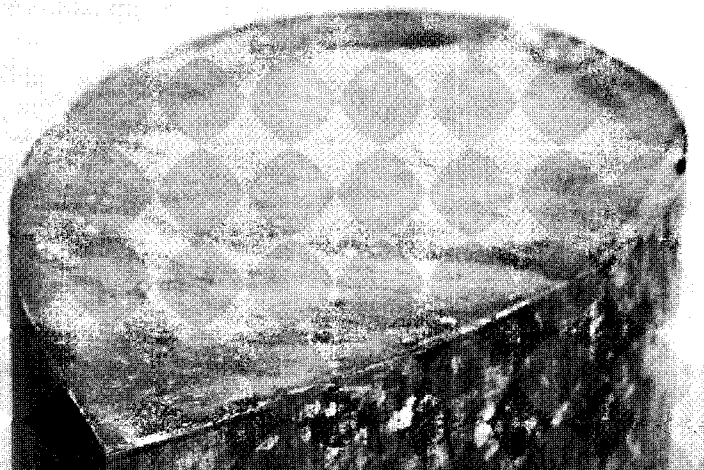

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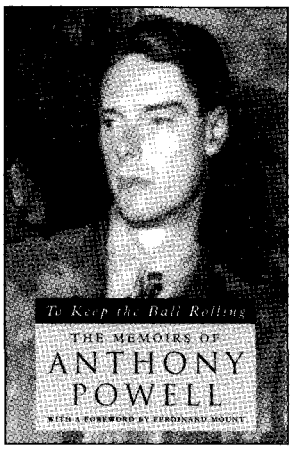

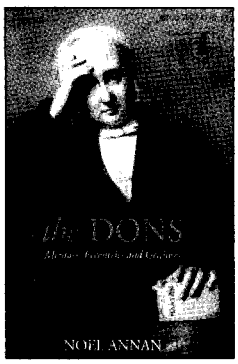

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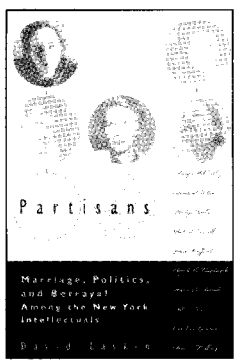

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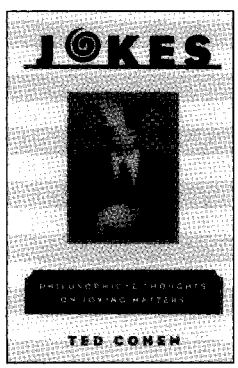

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Notes & Comments: June 2001

Culture contra ideology

In *The Revolt of the Masses* (1922), Ortega y Gasset, describing the "triumph of hyperdemocracy," observed that

> a characteristic of our times is the predominance, even in groups traditionally selective, of the mass and the vulgar. Thus, in intellectual life, which of its essence requires and presupposes qualification, one can note the progressive triumph of the pseudo-intellectual. . . . *The characteristic of the hour is that the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be commonplace, has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will.* . . . The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated.

As Ortega notes, "hyperdemocracy" has no specific ideological allegiance. It is a function of neither the Left nor the Right, though it can appear as a standard-bearer for either. Its chief characteristic is the assumption of "unlimited rights" and simultaneous repudiation of the obligations that rights entail. The result is not a conflict between moralities but a crisis within the core of moral life. "The mass man," Ortega concludes, "is simply without morality, which is always, in essence, a sentiment of submission to something, a consciousness of service and obligation."

We were reminded of Ortega's melancholy reflections recently when reading George Walden's essay on "New Labour" in the May 11 issue of *The Times Literary Supplement*. A Conservative MP from the early 1980s until 1997, Mr. Walden is highly critical of Tony Blair's "Cool Britannia." But he writes less as a defeated politician than a disillusioned one. His essay, essentially a digest of his book *The New Elites: Making a Career in the Masses* (Allen Lane, 2000), is every bit as hostile to the Tory establishment as it is to Labour. Mr. Walden has two main targets. One is populist ideology or "ultra democracy" (what Ortega called "hyperdemocracy"). The other is what he describes in *The New Elites* as "our antiquated up/down, Left/Right thinking." About the latter, his chief message is "A pox on both your houses."

We do not share Mr. Walden's confidence that "the Left-Right game is over." It seems to us, for example, that there are substantial differences between Tony Blair and William Hague, just as there were between Al Gore and George W. Bush. We have been hearing "the end of ideology" proclaimed for decades; somehow, though, differences of manners, morals, and sensibility—to say

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nothing of differences of policy—contrive to keep ideology alive. The U.S. presidential election last fall was so hotly contested because the candidates' supporters understood that the outcome mattered. America led by Al Gore would not be the same as America led by George W. Bush. If the differences between the parties should not be exaggerated, neither should they be forgotten.

Perhaps what we have seen is not the end but the maturation of ideology, in the course of which Left and Right have learned to poach freely on each other's successes. Some observers noted that Bill Clinton triumphed partly by appropriating Republican programs and policies. Something similar can be said of Tony Blair. He has succeeded partly by betraying Labour as traditionally understood and partly by adopting measures first advocated by the Tories. And yet Margaret Thatcher was right when she observed recently that Blair's triumph in the general election this month would be a "socialist victory." (Blair, she suggested, had "socialism . . . in his bloodstream.") Whatever else one could say about it, a victory by William Hague would not be a triumph for socialism.

Part of Mr. Walden's message concerns the obsolescence of politics. "The penalty of political progress," he writes, "is indifference to politics, and rational apathy is hard to discourage." But can one really speak of a "rational" apathy here? There is a reason that Tocqueville concluded *Democracy in America* with a warning that "general apathy," the attitude that democracy was most likely to nurture, was also the attitude it had most to fear. This is because apathy breeds complacency, inviting despotism. There is a sense in which Mr. Walden is right that "if politics matter less, within reason it matters less who is in charge." But everything turns on the meaning of the phrase "within reason." The authors of *The Federalist Papers* were right that men cannot be counted on to be "angels" and that a good government is one that makes provision for mediocre leaders. But they also assumed that citizens, whatever their absorption in private matters, would remain interested in matters that affected their freedom. The perfection of bureaucracy tends to breed indifference. But that is a tendency to be resisted, not welcomed.

We register these caveats not because we wish to take issue with Mr. Walden but to put into context our enthusiasm for his astute comments about the effects of populist "ultra democracy" on culture. It has been in the realm of culture, Mr. Walden observes in his essay, that New Labour has done its "greatest damage." As is the case in America, the damage wrought by populism has consisted partly in a lowering of standards, partly in a blurring of distinctions, both carried out with the arrogant elitism of the anti-elite. "Access," Mr. Walden writes,

> has come to mean lowering intellectual as well as other barriers, and, as cultural condescension has become official policy, pissing on the masses—smilingly, as if dispensing champagne—is now standard practice among persons of authority in the arts. . . .
>
> Under New Labour, a kind of intellectual soft porn has come to permeate the ether, which makes it possible for a BBC arts correspondent to declare . . . that a photo-montage in a department store by Sam Taylor-Wood bears comparison with the works of the Renaissance because Renaissance patrons, too, commissioned large works for public places.

As Mr. Walden notes in *The New Elites*, to the extent that "anti-elitism is a euphemism for resentment of excellence, everyone will lose."

It is an insidious process that Mr. Walden describes. The natural defense against the progress of euphemism—hypocrisy is a less attractive word for it—is the arrogant double-think of irony: a "set, ironic rictus," Mr. Walden notes, is the telltale mask of our

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times. And with such irony comes a kind of dissembling quietism. "Never has it been more tempting or rewarding to shut up, relax and go with a tide that few seem anxious to resist and that there seems not the remotest prospect of redirecting."

It is of course a temptation we ought to resist. But to resist it we must also resist the blandishments of liberal piety, the seductive rhetoric that assures us that tolerance trumps honesty and that no standard or value is more precious than equality. Here, too, we see the insidiousness of euphemism, the refusal of reality that corrupts good intentions unanchored by an attachment to truth. "What began as a tolerant, liberal stance towards society and its prevailing culture," Mr. Walden notes, "can turn out to be something very different. Look closer and you will discover . . . that cynicism is being passed off as tolerance and that the liberality disguises a neo-patrician insouciance."

The picture Mr. Walden paints is a grim one. It is grimmer in his article for the *TLS* than in his book, partly because in *The New Elites* he gestures toward alternatives to the degradation he anatomizes. As is often the case, the truest signs of hope begin in expressions of dissatisfaction. Looking over the wreckage that has been visited on schools, television, newspapers, and morality, Mr. Walden writes at the end of his book that we find not only ironic indifference but also, and increasingly, exasperation: "Surely we can do better than this?" That exasperation should be nurtured, for it points to the beginning of an alternative to the established culture of euphemism and populist egalitarianism. It shows itself in seemingly small things, casual acts of independence:

> The new counter-culture includes publishers who do their best to publish books on account of their worth rather than their likely sales; . . . critics who say precisely what they think about the latest must-read novel or, even braver, decline to read it; dons with no smarmily populist agenda; juries who give prizes to difficult as opposed to infantilizing works; radio or TV personnel who persist in their ambitions to produce worthwhile programmes; . . . journalists who . . . manage to knock royalty, sex and scandal off the front pages.

Of course, Britain's New Labour has had no monopoly on tawdriness. Already in the early 1920s, Ortega saw that the rise of mass culture would crush "beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified, and select." What is new, or newish, is the celebration of trash by those elements of society that had once been entrusted with the task of preserving culture. This phenomenon, which began in the 1960s on the intellectual fringe, has now become political big business. It is this phenomenon that Mr. Walden sees with such acerbic clarity. It has earned his contempt, his ridicule, his disgust. At times, we fear, it has led him to embrace the very irony he elsewhere cautions against. But in the end his message is militant in the best possible sense.

The populism he decries exerts a suffocating pressure that is felt throughout every area of life. The antidote, if there is an antidote, lies in the counter-pressure of genuine culture. Citing a report issued by the Collège de France, Mr. Walden suggests that "one of the main functions of culture is that of a means of defence against all forms of pressure—ideological, political, religious." No defense is perfect. And in the realm of culture, a defense is effective only to the extent that it is acknowledged as necessary. The rictus of indifference issues soothing blandishments. But as Mr. Walden notes, "in an age when the abuse of power endured by the common man comes from his loudest champions, he will need all the means of defense he can get."

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Tate Modern inside & out: I

The museum as culture mall

by Hilton Kramer

Absence of heart—as in public buildings—
Absence of mind—as in public speeches—
Absence of worth—as in goods intended for the public,

Are telltale signs that a chimera has just dined
On someone else; of him, poor foolish fellow,
Not a scrap is left, not even his name.
—W. H. Auden, in "The Chimeras"

Of the late, lamented Tate Gallery in London, it can be said that only a name is left, but now clipped of its definite article and divided into dubious duplicate, Tate Modern and Tate Britain—a reminder, if we need one, that two negatives cannot be expected to produce a positive result. Yet this ill-conceived project clearly represents the spirit of the age, which in art and in life is besotted with an appetite for destroying what is good by enlarging it to a scale of extinction. It puts us on notice that in the twenty-first century we shall need no wars to devastate our monuments to the past. Our cultural bureaucrats have shown themselves to be fully capable of performing the task for us.

At the outset of these melancholy reflections on Tate Modern, I must acknowledge that I put off visiting this bizarre creation—or should I say bazaar creation?—for a longer time than was, perhaps, appropriate for a professional critic of art and its institutions. Yet I had my reasons. The publicity campaign preceding the breakup of the old Tate Gallery into two new museums—Tate Britain, which is now to be devoted to British art, and Tate Modern, which ostensibly provides London with its first museum of modern art—was not of a sort that inspired confidence in the entire enterprise. Whether we call it hype or spin or (as we used to say) false advertising, it was clearly a campaign to prepare the public for an art museum that was to be something other than a traditional art museum. What this other thing might be remained a little vague, but one somehow had the impression that the advancement of an aesthetic understanding of works of art would not be its top priority.

The announcement of the Tate's breakup coincided, moreover, with the Blair government's promotion of a policy called Cool Britannia, which cheerfully promised to extirpate all signs of Britishness from the U.K.'s institutions and their symbols—a campaign of self-annihilation that, in my view, is a death warrant for much that I have cherished in Britain during my frequent visits over the course of some four decades. Suddenly, the very words "British" and "English" were being stigmatized as "racist" by wacko members of the Blair government—a sure sign that "New Labour," as the Blair government bills itself, was launching a far-reaching *Kulturkampf* bound to effect the art museums, which in Britain (as in most of Europe) are state institutions.

My mounting feeling of dread was fur-

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ther advanced when, shortly before the opening of the new Tates, I attended a lecture at our own Museum of Modern Art in New York by the mastermind of this project, Sir Nicholas Serota, who outlined his program of "new narratives" for these institutions. Sir Nicholas spoke like a man who had lately emerged from a conversion experience somewhere in the vicinity of Disneyland or some other American theme park. Themes, themes, and more themes were now to determine every aspect of the museums' "new narratives," while historical chronology and the presentation of art according to periods, styles, and movements were to be consigned to oblivion as outmoded, if not indeed—perish the thought—elitist.

Thus distinctions between past and present, never mind the very idea of tradition in art, were to be abandoned in favor of something like a boundless eternal present in which an anaesthetic populist ideology would trump every other intellectual imperative. Thinking back now about Sir Nicholas's talk at MOMA that evening, it occurs to me that his only remaining attachment to tradition of any sort is to be found in his acceptance of a knighthood from Her Majesty's government. Was this a sign of hypocrisy? Perhaps. But as it was also a sign of power, it was deemed to be acceptable. All of which I took to be a dour augury, and I was in any case fully occupied elsewhere. I was in no hurry to visit the ruins of what I had for so long regarded as a beloved embodiment of the civilization that had successfully survived the punishing wars and revolutions of the twentieth century with its democracy, its civility, and many of its cultural traditions intact.

By March, however, I felt I could no longer defer this professional obligation, and I set off for London with a heavy heart. Arriving at night, I had my first encounter with the new, dumbed-down BBC—another sign of the times—when I attempted to find a news broadcast on the television set in my hotel room. What I found was a dispiriting variety of tabloid journalism, delivered in a distinctly downmarket accent, that was determined to whip up hysteria over the spread of foot-and-mouth disease in the countryside while exploiting the already rampant cynicism over the sleaze-scandals of the Blair government. The obvious correlatives that obtained between the Blair government's hype and the Tates' spin strategy were ominous indeed.

Still, London looked beautiful the next morning as I set off on foot from my hotel in Knightsbridge to see "The Genius of Rome" exhibition at the Royal Academy in Piccadilly. Spring comes earlier to London than to New York, and the parks were already ablaze with daffodils and primroses in bloom. The sun was shining, the skies were blue, and "The Genius of Rome" show (brilliantly reviewed in our April issue by Karen Wilkin) proved to be every bit as marvelous as I had expected it to be. It was a pleasure to be able to revisit this exhibition twice again during my week in London. Marvelous, too, was the big exhibition of Rembrandt's etchings at the British Museum.

I was less thrilled—appalled, in fact—by the new, horribly overscale entrance to the British Museum, which now encloses the museum's legendary Reading Room in a faceless structure of monstrous height and girth. No matter how well acquainted we may be with the many examples of execrable museum architecture in our time, atrocities of this magnitude have not lost their power to shock when we first encounter them. It therefore seemed prudent to put off my initial visit to Tate Modern for another day.

That day, too, was bright with sunshine and blue skies, which made the taxi ride to Bankside, across the Thames, a very pleasant journey. Despair descended, however, immediately upon entering the vast ascending ramp, fully wide enough (it seemed) for two-way truck traffic, that serves as the principal pedestrian entrance to Tate Modern. This unwelcoming space in what was once a power station seems deliberately to embrace the featureless brutality of an un-

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derground parking garage. Until then, I had thought that the lugubrious Hayward Gallery, designed in the 1960s in what its creators were happy to call the Brutalist style, was the worst museum building in London, but that distinction now has been won by Tate Modern. It was almost enough to make one lapse into nostalgia for the kinder and gentler horrors of the Museé d'Orsay in Paris, which was originally built to serve as a major railway terminal and still feels like one.

I had only just entered this behemoth, but it was already enough to make one experience a profound sense of loss—a loss not only of beauty and amenity, but of civilization itself. This was an experience that was to be repeated many times as I began to make my way through the organized chaos of the place, for upon ascending to the top of the unlovely entrance ramp, the visitor to Tate Modern suddenly encounters a somewhat different prospect: the gloom of an underground parking garage dissolves into something resembling a gigantic airport arrivals terminal, where crowds, confusion, and commercialism reign and the only work of art to be seen is what I suppose must be called a sculpture constructed of discarded office furniture. This turned out to be one of Damien Hirst's non-zoological inspirations, and it prompted me to wonder if this mini-monument to Neo-Dada was meant to represent some sort of farewell to The Tate Gallery of old—a memento mori, as it were. Or was it, perhaps, to be construed as a symbolic portrait of Sir Nicholas himself—a portrait of the museum director as deranged bureaucrat? When I put this question to a harried clerk at the Information counter, he was unable (or unwilling) to shed any light in the matter. Given the unrelieved din that made even a brief exchange of words something of a feat, I could hardly blame him.

Then it became a question of what to attempt to see first: the reinstallation of the Tate's modern art collection or its mammoth inaugural theme exhibition—"Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis." Given the museum's chaotic layout, there was no consecutive way of seeing either without skipping floors and doubling back. For the sections of "Century City" devoted to London and Bombay were right there on the first floor, behind the Information counter, while the sections devoted to other cities in this mad mélange of what it pleased its sizable cadre of curators to call art and culture but was often neither—Paris, Rio, Vienna, Moscow, New York, and Lagos—were on the fourth floor, sandwiched in between the two floors, three and five, devoted to a reinstallation of the museum's collection.

In the end, the order in which the visitor to Tate Modern looks at anything—whether walls festooned with words or rooms in which magazines and newspapers vie for attention with works of art—hardly matters. For every object and every wall text is manacled to its assigned themes and classified according to its subject and subsubject. In the "Century City" show, each metropolis was also strictly confined to a specific time frame. This was lucky for Paris, which was assigned the years 1905–1915, and for Vienna, which was given 1908–1918, and so some art worth looking at was actually on the walls. The way it was presented, however, was another story—a "new narrative."

You might think it impossible to devote even a thematic show to the art and culture in Paris in the years 1905–1915 that could reduce its high artistic achievement to a tedious, incoherent jumble. Yet Serge Fauchereau, the curator of the Paris section of "Century City," somehow managed to pull off this unimaginable feat without a hitch. A few of Picasso's and Braque's finest Cubist collages, for example, were hung in a narrow corridor in which they could hardly be seen if three or four people were present at the same time. And remember, "Century City" was designed to draw huge crowds—and did. The sound track—Stravinsky, I think—didn't help matters, either. It only added to the din.

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New York, to be blunt about it, was given the shaft in "Century City." To provide even a foreshortened glimpse of art in New York in the twentieth century, what period would commend itself? The years before and during World War I when Alfred Stieglitz was showing John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, Paul Strand, *et al.*, and publishing *Camera Work*? Or the period in the 1940s and 50s when the Abstract Expressionists captured the attention of artists and critics on both sides of the Atlantic, and New York itself became the art capital of the Western world?

Forget it. The geniuses who organized "Century City" were clearly determined to cut New York down to size—the smallest possible size. So the New York section of the show was limited to a five-year slot, 1969–1974—compared, say, to the fifteen-year period, 1955–1970, assigned to Lagos, and the fourteen years, 1950–1964, given to Rio de Janeiro. The point, apparently, was to find a time when New York in particular and the United States as a whole could be depicted as a society on the skids.

The iconic object here was the silkscreen print of a demonic Richard Nixon which Andy Warhol produced for the George McGovern campaign in 1972. And to underscore an alleged absence of significant art in New York in this half-decade period, the curator of the New York section—Donna de Salvo—featured the work of Linda Benglis, Hannah Wilke, Vito Acconci, and Gordon Matta-Clark. The creepiest thing of all, perhaps, was the first wall text which greeted visitors to the New York section of "Century City": a quotation from that celebrated connoisseur of urban amenity, the late Nikita Khrushchev, whose statement deplored the absence of "greenery" in Manhattan. Apparently, nobody took the trouble to show him Central Park when he made his famous foray to New York to announce that the Soviets would "bury" us.

Does all this suggest that "Century City" was, in its principal focus and energy, more of an exercise in left-wing political pieties than a serious inquiry into the worldwide achievements of art and culture in the twentieth century? You bet. Hence the exuberant attention lavished upon the Moscow section of "Century City," which focused on the years 1916–1930. Did anything even vaguely unpleasant happen to the modernist movement in Russia in this period? Well, sort of. Lutz Becker, the curator of the Moscow section of the show, does very briefly acknowledge that "Mayakovsky's suicide and Malevich's three-month imprisonment as a suspected spy in 1930 were for many a signal of the beginning of Stalin's terror." But that's the last we hear of such unpleasantness, and even this less than satisfactory reference to the Terror that vanquished the Soviet avant-garde is quickly followed by a statement that is patently false. "Throughout the 1920s," writes Mr. Becker, "artists had contributed to the new society voluntarily and with enthusiasm, with a minimum of Party interference." The fact is, you either had to give up your artistic freedom in favor of Party hack work or leave the country to survive. Which is why Rodchenko, Stepanova, Lissitzky, and other true believers in the Revolution became, in their graphic art, apologists for Stalin's Terror, and also why, by 1923, Kandinsky, Chagall, Gabo, Pevsner, and many other talents had already fled to the West.

What was finally even worse than the political slant of "Century City" was its pervasive contempt for art itself—a contempt that refused to acknowledge that works of art do not, in the character and quality of the experience they afford, differ from any other variety of material culture. As a consequence, it was only as a variety of material culture that works of art were presented to the public in this "new narrative" of social ideology.

Alas, it cannot be said that the reinstallation of the Tate's collection of modern art fared much better. In this "new narrative," an elaborate system of classifying objects according to themes reduces all of the art to four basic categories: "History/Memory/Society"; "Nude/Action/Body"; "Land-

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scape/Matter/Environment"; and "Still Life/Object/Real Life." Except for the artists who are given the privilege of having rooms largely devoted to their work—Bruce Nauman and Louise Bourgeois, among the Americans, and Richard Deacon and Ben Nicholson, among the Brits—the idea seems to be to pit unlike talents against each other in a game of survival-of-the-strongest. Thus a Richard Long mud wall is pitted against a water lilies painting by Claude Monet in the "Landscape/Matter/Environment" section. The most horrific of these confrontational installations is the room in the "Nude/Action/Body" section in which several really grim paintings by Lucian Freud and Christian Schad are pitted against a single exquisite work by Bonnard—*The Bath* (1925), the first of the many paintings Bonnard devoted to the subject of his wife lying full length in a bath tub, and a picture that was much beloved by an earlier generation of English painters. This grotesque abuse of a masterpiece ought really to be called museum rape, and it tells us everything we need to know about Sir Nicholas's "new narratives." In one of the installations at Tate Britain, by the way, Lucian Freud is similarly pitted against a Whistler portrait of a girl in a white dress.

Why, one is finally left wondering, this persistent, pernicious imperative to degrade art of superior subtelty and delicacy—Monet, Bonnard, *et al.*—by means of incongruous juxtaposition with the kinds of art that are blatantly inimical to its spirit? We can only guess at the motives governing this malign impulse, which is as pervasive in the installation of the Tate's permanent collection of modern art as it is in so much of the art selected for the "Century City" installations. My own guess is that it may be an attempt by a younger generation of curators to reduce the masterworks of modern art to the debased levels of feeling which dominate the so-called Young British Artists—think "Sensation," which came to the Brooklyn Museum by way of the Royal Academy and the Charles Saatchi collection. The current London art establishment has so much invested (in every sense) in the international prosperity of these YBAs that it was probably inevitable that their supporters would make an attempt to bring everything else down to their level. From this perspective, it makes perfect sense, then, that the first work which the visitor to Tate Modern encounters is that construction of discarded office furniture by Damien Hirst.

It makes the same kind of sense for the New York section of "Century City" to be dominated by some overscale urban debris—no doubt rescued from the demolition of a New York building—by Gordon Matta-Clark and by Linda Benglis's photograph of herself in the nude sporting a sizable dildo—a picture that once served as an advertisment in *Artforum*. If items like these were meant to signify that New York art in the early 1970s is only of interest to London now as a kind of prelude to the Brits' own YBAs, the point is well made. But for most of us in New York, Gordon Matta-Clark and Linda Benglis were entirely marginal to what art in New York was up to in that period. At every turn at Tate Modern, a line remembered from William Hazlitt seemed to sum up the whole spirit of the place: "People who lack delicacy hold us in their power." Is this really the way to run a museum?

The truth is, Tate Modern isn't an art museum at all. It's something else—a culture mall in which bits and pieces of twentieth-century art, culture, and politics are deboned and pre-packaged for quick and effortless consumption. It is the function of this culture mall to reduce the achievements of high art to the sensation levels of tabloid journalism and pop entertainment. It addresses itself not only to a pop sensibility but to a pop attention span, and with a similar need for interminable hubbub. Is it any wonder, then, that it has proved to be a tremendous success, especially appealing to the young? But this success has been purchased at what is also a tremendous price. *Absence of heart, Absence of mind, Absence of worth*: Tate Modern has them all.

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Tate Modern inside & out: II

"Second city" syndrome

by Francis Morrone

As every visitor to London knows, *Time Out* is a weekly publication featuring a comprehensive listing of goings-on about town. Its orientation is very youth-trendy, but the listings are extensive enough that all kinds of people purchase it—it's as good for finding out about what's on at Wigmore Hall as it is for news on the latest fifteen-minute pop sensation. Every year *Time Out* supplements its weekly publication with a "London Visitor's Guide." Now, for many people, the editorial content of *Time Out* is negligible stuff. Nonetheless, from a sociological perspective, this editorial content, with its invocations of what's hot and what's not, has, I think, a real value. The principal editorial feature in the 2000–2001 "Vistor's Guide" is a piece by Rhonda Carrier entitled "All Change?" One inevitably is first drawn to the call-out quotes in the loudly designed piece. "Londoners have had to wait for the dawn of a new millennium to kickstart a programme of projects both large and small that will change the face of the city forever." The tone of "All Change?" is all excitement, telling of how London is new again, the capital of cool. The stodgy old architecture is finally being supplemented by ravishing new buildings, as the physical environment finally responds to the cutting-edge work of the 1990s Young British Artists. Tony Blair's "Cool Britannia" is not the marketers' cliché that "Swinging *London*" was back in the sixties; it is, increasingly, a brick-and-mortar, steel-and-glass reality. London, in other words, is, or soon will be, no longer London. Hooray!

Many Londoners seem to have grown tired of London, and wish to replace it with some other city. I turn again to that superb barometer of the new direction, Rhonda Carrier: There is, she says of the fogeys' love of heritage,

> a touch of snobbery about the unquestioning equation of age and desirability, and more than a smidgeon of plain British guilt and lily-liveredness at letting go of the past, as if our whole national identity was encapsulated therein. This attitude has been exacerbated by the fact that London emerged relatively unscathed from the horrors of World War II and has impunity from natural disasters—just compare it to Tokyo, say, where continual reconstruction due to incessant ravaging by fire, earthquakes and bombs means that scarcely any building dates back more than two decades. London's face has—until now, that is—remained remarkably little changed over the course of the last couple of centuries.

A reader of magazines reads all kinds of goofy stuff, but this is prime. It will of course come as a bit of a surprise to any Londoner over the age of sixty to learn that his city emerged unscathed from World War II. It is particularly ironic that Ms. Carrier should say such a thing in an article that is largely about Tate Modern, which is housed in a retrofitted building designed by Giles

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Gilbert Scott (1880–1960), one of whose major accomplishments was the rebuilding of the House of Commons chamber that German incendiary bombs destroyed in 1941. This rebuilding was a major statement of British pride and pluck in the aftermath of war. At that time, with but minor exceptions, British tradition was not something to be shouted off the stage, but something fought over. Even Nikolaus Pevsner in promoting modernism claimed for it the imprimatur of British tradition.

It is not my purpose here to analyze the reasons for the youthful disdain for Britain's past, or what we may call traditional values. All I can say is if there have been hints of this disdain in the past, today the disdain, in Blair's Britain, has become institutionalized. Peter Hitchens wrote a book called *The Abolition of Britain*.[1] The title is not hyperbole.

Part of what has institutionalized the abolition of London is the national lottery. The billions of pounds it has generated have been largely earmarked for building projects. The young Londoners who looked to Mitterrand's Paris with its *grands projets* now feel, courtesy of the lottery, that London leads the world in *grands projets*. There's the Dome, of course, an enormous boondoggle, but ultimately rather an insignificant part of the capital's transformation. Much more significant has been the "London Eye," which is technically not a Ferris wheel but which is, for want of another term, a Ferris wheel. Its iconic presence in the heart of the city has been likened to that of the Eiffel Tower. Many other projects are not such visible elements of the cityscape, but have garnered enormous attention—and crowds, which is what Cool Britannia seems in the end to be mostly about.

The principal symbol of young London is Tate Modern, at Bankside, the "Cathedral of Cool" as the press has dubbed it. It is unsurprising that museums are leading the way in the remaking of London. As has often been pointed out, museums, beginning, perhaps, with the Centre Pompidou, are the architectural emblems of our postmodern age. While museums have long been among cities' most important buildings, there is a difference today. Where once museums were conceived as storehouses of the nation's treasures, as pedagogical institutions, and as instruments of mass acculturation, today's new breed of museums is mostly about providing entertainment. Rhonda Carrier in *Time Out* celebrates the fact that the Olde London "theme park" seems to be a dying thing, replaced by the vitality of the YBAs and the new architecture. Yet, to use the much overused term of opprobrium "theme park," it's very hard to think of anything other than a true theme park that is more theme-park-like than some of these new museums. Tate Modern is surely among those in the forefront of this trend.

Architecturally, there are major differences between Tate Modern and some of the other new museums. The Centre Pompidou, Guggenheim Bilbao, and so on are major architectural "statements." The same cannot be said of Tate Modern, largely because it is a retrofitted building the external aspect of which adds little that is new to the city (other than large crowds where before there were no crowds). Inside it's different, of course. But it's not like London put a Frank Gehry titanium blob on the south bank of the Thames, forever altering the image of the city. Tate Modern is, rather, the familiar Bankside Power Station, designed in the 1940s by Scott. When the Tate acquired the site, they contemplated pulling down the old building. Laudably, they deemed it worthy of preservation. (In truth they'd never have got away with a new building of anything like the power station's dimensions.) The building is not a masterpiece—it is far from that. But it is a good building, and it is familiar, and it seldom makes sense to pull down good and familiar structures when they can be retrofitted. It's also a work by a man I consider one of

1 *The Abolition of Britain*, by Peter Hitchens; Encounter Books, 332 pages, $22.95.

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Britain's finest twentieth-century architects. Scott's dauntingly varied output ranges from Liverpool Cathedral to Battersea Power Station (Bankside's pendant to the west) and the glorious old London red telephone box.

Nearing his career's end, Scott chose to be very muted in his approach to the Bankside building. The style is a kind of "stripped classic," with even something of an Art Deco flavor. Scott relieved the building's brown-brick bulk through such devices as subtly projecting wall planes and mullions. He gave great care to the surfaces of the 325-foot tower, accentuating its rise with thin vertical strips of patterned brickwork. As with his earlier Battersea Power Station, Scott's Bankside plant is an ode to brickwork. For a high-towered power plant, it's a retiring thing, though through its subtle and elegant details not a dull thing. Neither Scott nor anyone else wished to upstage St. Paul's dome, across the river. Given that this was an enormous power plant, the scale of which was what it was, meant that so modulating its impact was a fairly tall order, and we sometimes insufficiently appreciate the care and skill that go into the design of a building like this. If Bankside is not the near-masterpiece that the Battersea plant is, Scott nonetheless succeeded here with a tact and decorum that is scarcely imaginable among many London architects of today. And I can't help thinking that this impressed Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron when the Tate hired them to redevelop the building into a museum. Their principal alteration of the exterior is in the form of a two-story "light box" added to the roof, set behind and to either side of the tower. If this is not the revolutionary gesture certain bizarrely besotted critics have made it out to be, it's nonetheless hard to think anyone would find it objectionable. While there were those in the architectural profession who preferred the power station be pulled down and replaced by a "signature" building, that instead the Tate preserved and retrofitted the plant is cause for hosannas.

Scott's designs were seldom on the order of great works (Liverpool Cathedral, one of the most important works of twentieth-century British architecture, being a notable exception), though they are works that, often in small but significant ways, improved the urban quality of London. (Rhonda Carrier is of course spectacularly wrong in saying that physically London has not changed much in two hundred years.) The phone boxes, Waterloo Bridge (a fine work even as it replaced Rennie's original which was one of the glorious bridges of all time), the Commons renovation, and so on, not least a structure such as Bankside Power Station, demonstrated Scott's superb taste and sense of decorum, his lack of the kind of ego that caused Norman Foster to design a new headquarters for the Greater London Authority that instead of deferring to its historic surroundings upstages them.

Only a few years ago, at the height of the preservation movement, there seemed to be a consensus among the public and the planners that respect for context, for the physical fabric of cities (which Jane Jacobs taught us was far more delicate than we thought), ought to be architects' paramount concern. But the young and old Turks of today have grown bored with urban nuance. Critics like Herbert Muschamp in *The New York Times* passionately advocate an architecture of urban disruption and discontinuity, as though modern urban life didn't already have enough disruptions and discontinuities. Compare this with the thinking behind the design of Tower Bridge. Horace Jones, the City Architect charged with designing the new bridge, which was built between 1886 and 1894, looked around him and determined that his design should blend in with the Tower of London. "Forward-looking" architects of the time disdained Jones as a hack who didn't know how passé his neo-medieval style was. But in time, people have not only grown accustomed to Tower Bridge, but it has also become a proud symbol of London, even if there remain those who cannot quite understand that the

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bridge's qualities add up to what is, in fact, good architecture.

Foster's new GLA headquarters, Rhonda Carrier tells us, will provide "a much-needed injection of modernity and whimsy into a stretch of the river dominated by the trusty but fusty Tower of London and Tower Bridge." Bringing whimsy to a fusty corner of London is not at all what Norman Foster is after. What he wishes, rather, is to create yet another inescapably public ode to himself. You can't get farther from Giles Gilbert Scott or Horace Jones or any number of other contributors to the delicate urban fabric of London. The GLA headquarters is a startling building. It has been likened to an enormous headlight, and will "offer a very literal example of form following function: almost wholly transparent, so that passersby will be able to see the GLA busy at work, it's being touted as a truly democratic building." Apparently "democracy" means total lack of privacy. Tower Bridge, instead, was a wholly modern structure of steel that was concealed by stone, and is in all ways gloriously un-"democratic."

Would that our museums, too, be less "democratic." Tate Modern is less a place to view and contemplate art than it is a place for a "fun" outing. It is just as well that the retrofitted building contains cafés and shops and lounges and views, because the art just doesn't hold the attention. One enters the building from the west into what is called the "Turbine Hall," a name that was probably not employed when this was a power plant, but that has such an edge of industrial chic to it that there was no way it would yield to "lobby." Off the Turbine Hall is a vast shop, de rigueur in all the new museums. Stairs and escalators lead to the next level. One might think that in a rectilinear, longitudinally accentuated space like this that pathways and directions would be simple. In fact, the complete absence of traditional architectural devices—moldings, door enframements, floor patternings, and so on—render the space too undifferentiated and confusing. It's kind of like an airport terminal where verbiage—in the form of signs—is required to do the work once done by *architecture*. One expends much needless energy in this space, and that's not at all a function of its scale. (Compare it with the concourse of Grand Central Terminal, a monumental space, of dimensions comparable to the Turbine Hall, where, because the parts relate so sensibly one to the other, there is never the feeling of needless motion.) The second level contains another shop, as well as a capacious restaurant.

The art begins on the third level, and unless my notes are mistaken there's actually not a shop on this level—an oversight? Here are two large galleries devoted to Tate Modern's controversial and rather silly scheme of organizing its artworks. On the west is the "Landscape/Matter/Environment" section, and on the east is the "Still Life/Object/Real Life" section. (Much has been made of Tate Modern's decision to jettison chronology in its installations.) The fourth level has space for temporary exhibitions, as well as a shop. The fifth level gives us "History/Memory/Society" and "Nude/Action/Body." The sixth level contains the members' room, and the seventh and highest level features another restaurant, this with much touted stunning views across the river, toward St. Paul's.

Once out of the Turbine Hall, the layout is very easy to follow. Yet for all the space at the architects' and curators' disposal, there is a curiously cramped quality to the exhibition spaces, though perhaps I ought not to judge them so, given how crowded they were. Despite the crowds, I honestly do not feel that anyone was seriously contemplating the art. Even at blockbusters at the Metropolitan or the National Gallery, many people make an earnest effort to view the works, read the labels, and so on, even as others are content to amble blindly while loudly conversing. Here, I got the sense that the art was only so much bric-a-brac amidst which people wandered aimlessly until they got peckish and headed off to the next café. The galleries were loud, too,

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sometimes with the drone of video installations, but also with chatter: nothing at Tate Modern inspires decorous behavior.

Giles Worsley, the architecture critic for the *Telegraph*, wrote recently,

> Before work began the turbine hall was impressive, but simply because it was so large. Herzog and de Meuron have given it an awe-inspiring sense of purpose that makes it a modern-day rival to the great medieval cathedrals. With light flooding in through the clear glass of the east window, the space comes close to the sublime.

I think Worsley has it exactly backward. The Turbine Hall is an undeniably dramatic space, given its sheer breadth. It's 500 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 115 feet high. Our cities possess few such generous gifts of space. When the turbines were present and roaring, the space must have possessed that awful majesty, bordering on the sublime, that one sometimes senses in industrial environments, as for example among the blast furnaces of the lakeside steel plants in South Chicago. Today, tidied by Herzog & de Meuron, the space is still impressive, but nothing like sublime. Herzog & de Meuron removed the industrial detritus, opened up the space a bit, and installed more of their "light boxes" along the walls. They tried to maintain something of the industrial essence. These architects are most touted for their subtlety and elegance, and I feel (as I recall reading that they themselves came to feel) that the scale of this space just sort of swallowed up their subtle and elegant details. The end result, curiously, is that this space, though continuously animated by arriving and departing crowds, is probably a lot duller than it's ever been, either when it whirred with turbines, or when it decayed over decades into an industrial ruin.

Nor do Herzog & de Meuron fare any better in their design of the gallery spaces. What strikes one most is a kind of whitewashed primness, again not so much elegant as dull. There are no moldings, no color. Even the lighting is dull. Herzog & de Meuron err in thinking that such spaces are best for showing off art. The best gallery spaces (from Louis Kahn's at the Yale Center for British Art to Alvin Holm's reworking of the European paintings galleries at the Metropolitan) are carefully designed to enhance the experience of art. The best things at Tate Modern, as even the building's champions can't help pointing out, are the views from the gallery levels: to the north across the Thames, to the south onto the Turbine Hall. Herzog & de Meuron are good designers of views.

For that they won the Pritzker Prize? I know that's not fair. The Basel, Switzerland-based firm has done a few things besides Tate Modern. (Examples include a Prada store in Tokyo; offices and factories for Ricola, the coughdrop firm, in Basel; much-admired railway signal boxes in Basel; and the Dominus winery in the Napa Valley.) But make no mistake: Tate Modern is what put these guys over the top, and led to Pritzker consideration, as well as to a host of stateside commissions. The New York hotelier Ian Schrager scored quite a coup in selecting the architects for his new Astor Hotel on Lafayette Street: Rem Koolhaas and Herzog & de Meuron are, respectively, last year's and this year's Pritzker honorees. Never before, to my knowledge, have two Pritzker "laureates" collaborated on a project. It seems appropriate that it should be a trendy hotel by the former co-owner of Studio 54.

Elsewhere in London, Pritzker laureate Norman Foster is, as ever, busily transforming the capital. He designed, with the sculptor Anthony Caro, the Millennium Bridge, which was sort of completed last year. Sort of: no sooner did the bridge open, to great hoopla, than it ceased to function. What's getting the press this year, though, is his remodeling of the interior court of the British Museum in Bloomsbury. Officially the Queen Elizabeth II Great Court, it is touted as the "largest covered public square in Europe." What Foster did was to glass over the formerly

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open courtyard in the midst of which stood the old British Library reading room, superseded by Colin St. John Wilson's new British Library next to St. Pancras Station. Around the circular structure enclosing the reading room (completed in 1857), Foster placed large stairways allowing access to the reading room and to viewing points down onto it, as well as access to (what else?) the new restaurant. Tucked beneath the stairs is (what else?) the new shop. The new, much-touted glass roof ("designed by computer," the museum literature tells us) comprises hundreds of steel bars forming an intricate, mesh-like pattern of triangular panes ("like a giant jigsaw puzzle"). As with Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, the scale impresses.

Who would have thought that the British Museum could be made into a funhouse? "Funhouse" may be the wrong word. I had no fun at all when I went to the British Museum. Odd that something meant to attract crowds should handle those crowds so poorly, but at the British Museum courtyard the experience, on a Saturday afternoon, of ascending and descending the stairs to view the refurbished reading room was dismal. Manhattan subway stations at rush hour are slightly less congested than those stairs were. They are carefully designed for the views they afford, as architectural details loom into view that never before could be viewed from such perspectives—nor were ever meant to be so viewed.

That's part of the problem. Foster's disdain for these details is palpable, as, in one's ascent, a frighteningly large dentil or pediment, so scaled to be viewed from way below, sweeps, IMAX-like, into view. I suppose this was meant to be clever fun. Britain's current leading architect apparently regards the building blocks of London tradition as so much discrete fodder for his clever manipulation. So much in new architecture, not only in England but all over the world, is distorted and disorienting, and lauded for so being. Things like classic entry sequences, scaled to the pedestrian's perspective; imaginable, visually ascertainable combinations and outlines of building parts; judicious dispositions of ornament and detail, yielding something like a grammar that, where appropriate, might be exploited to rhetorical purpose within schemes of conventionalized understandings—these traditional components of the urban fabric, built up however querulously or provisionally over long periods of time, are now jettisoned for the quick transfixion of ordinary experience, just as some people take drugs. I remember when I was in high school reading counterculture tracts exhorting the young to "do drugs" so to be made aware of the arbitrariness of our ordinary perceptions. That's what the architects and their critical idolators wish to effect through the rebuilding of cities. It's the city as Exploding Plastic Inevitable. And don't get me started on Herbert Muschamp.

On another architectural front, Mayor "Red Ken" Livingstone appears intent on encouraging ever greater development of skyscrapers in London, a city long ambivalent about tall buildings. The arguments in favor are of the usual variety. The City needs them in order to maintain its status as a global financial center, and so on. I suspect the real reasons some people champion the tall buildings has more to do with fashion—and with despising "heritage." London, of course, has long been fitfully in the business of building skyscrapers, and the ones that have been built stick out like sore thumbs. So another argument for more skyscrapers is that in order not to seem like sore thumbs, tall buildings must be built in clusters, as in downtown and midtown Manhattan. Already London has Cesar Pelli's Canary Wharf Tower, at 800 feet the tallest building in Europe. But it's in Docklands, not in the heart of the City or the West End. The proposed skyscraper everyone is talking about is London Bridge Tower, by the chic Italian Renzo Piano, co-architect of the Centre Pompidou. At about a thousand feet high, it would be a giant even in Manhattan, and will dominate the London skyline. It will be sixty percent again as tall as the current tallest building in central London.

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(The dome of St. Paul's, by the way, higher than which London buildings were not allowed to rise until the 1950s, tops out at 365 feet. Even today only nine buildings in all of London are taller than that.) Norman Foster has designed the 600-foot Swiss Re Tower, dubbed the "Erotic Gherkin"—look at a picture, you'll see why—due to be completed by 2003, and New York's Kohn Pedersen Fox has weighed in with the 728-foot Heron Bishopsgate Tower, slated for completion in 2005. In all, the authorities have proposed several new clusters of tall buildings, in the City, the West End, and South London, to complement Docklands. "The idea," wrote Jonathan Glancey in the *Guardian*, "is that the City of London will have the look of a central business district (CBD) along the lines of, say, Sydney, Hong Kong, Shanghai or Los Angeles." That London should now wish to look like Hong Kong can only cause one to cheer on the coming recession.

In London, as in all great cities, there are antidotes. For me on my most recent visit it was the Wallace Collection. I know this museum isn't everyone's cup of tea. But there's plenty of good painting and decorative arts at the Wallace, in a sedate setting. Even on a Sunday afternoon, even in a museum that boasts of having recently tripled its attendance, I had great paintings all to myself for nearly as long as I wished —it's as far as I can imagine from the tumult and videophonic cacophony of Tate Modern, or the cattle-train "procession" of the Great Court.

The Wallace has been affected by lottery money, too. And like the British Museum, it's partly in the nature of a remodeling of a disused interior courtyard. Nothing clever here, though, but a simple glass enclosure so that a pleasant restaurant could be created. I have nothing against a museum providing me with a place to take a break for coffee or a glass of wine, or even to get a good meal; I ask only that it not be the museum's raison d'être. The Wallace, and its architect Rick Mather, got it right. They expanded the museum facilities underground. They made of that disused courtyard a sunny, happy thing (Mather is admired as an architect who seems to command the sun). Of course the Wallace wishes to increase attendance, and they want to rent out the new restaurant for corporate parties and such. But it seems to me they've put the collections first, not least by their program of gradually restoring the installations to something approximating how Sir Richard Wallace had them arranged when his widow bequeathed the house and its collections to the nation in 1897.

In the adulation of certain Londoners for Tate Modern and the British Museum's Great Court, in the refrains of "largest museum of modern art in the world" and "largest covered plaza in Europe" and "tallest building in Europe," Londoners exhibit classic "second city" behavior. (I know. I'm from Chicago.) The tone of all this touting would make one think it was Philadelphia we're talking about and not the onetime seat of empire, a city still arguably the world's greatest. My fear is that the sustained assault on Britain's past has made the only identity available to London that of a kind of sub-New York.

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Rimbaud: sophist of insanity

by Eric Ormsby

Stéphane Mallarmé caught a glimpse of Arthur Rimbaud on only one occasion and it was the younger poet's hands that stuck in his memory. These were, he later wrote, "vast hands, red with sores," which prompted the fastidious Mallarmé to say that "there was something defiantly or perversely emphatic about him, reminiscent of a working girl, specifically a laundress." A Belgian judge was less squeamish, remarking that Rimbaud had "the hands of a strangler." As Graham Robb, his latest and best biographer, remarks wryly, "these were not the delicate appendages from which elegant verses flow."[1] Rough, country hands, adapted to rural chores, one might think, rather than to battering French literature (along with a few of its feebler practitioners), and yet, if anyone merits the questionable distinction of literary demolisher, it is Rimbaud. With only a few savage but well-aimed swings of his rhetorical wrecking ball he seemed to fracture and upend all the flimsy subterfuges of the Parnassians among whom, to his signal disgust, he found himself whenever he fled to Paris from dreary Charleville. The famous injunction of his mentor, lover, and alter ego Verlaine, "Take eloquence and wring its neck!" (*Prends l'éloquence et tords-lui le cou!*), might have been (and probably was) penned with cudgel-fisted Rimbaud in mind.

His coarse and oversized hands are but the most flagrant anomaly in the person of Rimbaud. The famous photographs by Etienne Carjat, taken in October and December of 1871, when the poet was seventeen, reveal a face of exquisite hostility. The boyish cowlicks of his unruly hair belie the calm coldness of his gaze, though there is something unbearably sad in the slight lift of the eyebrows and the still-childish lips. From our perspective, one hundred and ten years after his death, it is not so much Rimbaud's rebelliousness which impresses as his precocious aplomb. The rustic with the unsightly paws was also the star Latinist at the Collège de Charleville and could improvise prize-winning Latin poems, in perfect meter and syntax, virtually on demand. Despite his much-vaunted "delirium" and his "derangement of the senses," Rimbaud is the most classical of poetic hooligans, drawing on a rhetorical facility that might have earned him the admiration of Bossuet and Chateaubriand.

Graham Robb's superb account of this strange prodigy's unsavory life provides all that the English-speaking reader needs for a better appreciation of Rimbaud, except for the works themselves. The forty-five illustrations include most of the known photographs of Rimbaud, as well as his reputed sketch of his mother; there also are photos of his friends, teachers, literary contemporaries, and even the houses in which he lived both as a child and later in Aden and

1 *Rimbaud: A Biography*, by Graham Robb; W. W. Norton, 570 pages, $35.

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Harar. (One of the most beautiful photographs here—of a coffee merchant in Harar—Rimbaud took himself). There are clear maps to help the reader trace Rimbaud's many treks through Abyssinia and the Horn of Africa. Robb has thought to include a Rimbaud family tree and a chronology of historical events. The notes and bibliography are succinct but expert, and the French texts of all lines and verses cited are given in an appendix (Robb's translations are merely serviceable and so the original texts are essential). Best of all, Robb writes gracefully and lucidly, the narrative never flags, and there are many sly and ironic asides to lighten the spectacular misery of the account. Thus, at one point, clearly exasperated by the antics of his poet, Robb observes: "While the readers of *poètes maudits* often identify with the poets themselves, critics and biographers tend to identify with the parents."

Robb does not dwell on it unduly, but the chief obstacle for any biographer of Rimbaud is the thick cladding of adulation which his admirers and imitators have superimposed upon him. Jean Cocteau summed this up nicely in *Le passé défini*, his autobiography (oddly not cited by Robb), when he remarked, in a malicious play on Rimbaud's wonderful poem "The Lice Seekers" (*Les chercheuses de poux*), that the poet needed to be cleansed of the "lice of exegesis" that had infested both his life and his work. Cocteau railed against the exegetes but Robb, more effectively, prefers to let the evidence speak for itself. In so doing he has given the fullest and most nuanced delousing of Rimbaud to date.

There is probably no contortion in the repertoire of revolt, from the least tic of rebellion to the most operatic spasm, that Rimbaud did not strive to embody. *A Season in Hell* (1873), his masterpiece, is a seething repository of mutinous attitudes. There seems to be nothing and no one whom he does not denounce, including—quite properly—himself. And when he has finished jibing at and anathematizing all social institutions, from the bourgeois family to the schools, the church, the military, and the state and, indeed, France itself, he rebels against rebellion and, in what is perhaps the most outrageous and puzzling of his postures, slinks abjectly to the foot of the Cross. In almost the same breath he can be fierily pious and impishly blasphemous, and both stances appear legitimate from this teenager of genius, at once seraph and oaf. Rimbaud's grandest refusal, and the one for which he has been lambasted by his epigones, was of literature itself. Small wonder that this definitive rejection still smarts: For a French poet to turn his back on literature and its concomitant share of *la Gloire* is almost as monstrous an abomination as if he had denounced Château d'Yquem or forsaken roquefort.

As Albert Camus pointed out long ago, an unusually wide gap separates Rimbaud's life and work; for Camus, it was the contradiction between the furious rebel of the poetry and the (later) gunrunner of Harar, compulsively clutching his money belt, that puzzled and confounded belief. But the antinomies go much deeper. At many pages of Graham Robb's biography, I found myself wondering whether this repellent adolescent, with his obsessive anxieties about money, military conscription, and his duty-driven mother, could be the same poet who had written such utterances as "I dreamt crusades, unrecorded voyages of exploration, history-less republics, stifled wars of religion, upheavals of custom, displacement of races and of continents: I believed in all the sorceries."

Especially in *A Season in Hell*, Rimbaud is the poet of crystallized attitudes, of flash-frozen poses. He delivers statements that appear throwaway and yet, the more nonchalant they seem, the more incisively they ring. He is a master of the precisely calibrated impromptu: "I shall return with iron limbs, my skin darkened, my eye furious" or "Women take care of those fierce convalescents come back from hot climes," a line that has an eerie premonitory feel, given Rimbaud's final months. He spins out day-

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dreams with such compression that they turn aphoristic. At these moments the reader realizes that Rimbaud is not so much a poet as a moralist and that he is the true heir, not of Baudelaire or Victor Hugo, but of Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, and Joubert. (Paul Claudel, who saw Rimbaud as "a mystic in the savage state," was the first to comment upon the queer affinity that links the poet, particularly in his prose masterpieces, to such predecessors as Pascal.) Even his most impudent declarations have the shape and cadence of maxims; they are burrs of words that hook the memory. Moreover, by casting his purely personal visions, opinions, and experiences in the iron-clad form of the epigram, he confers upon even his slightest words the force of a factitious universality: "The best is to sleep dead-drunk on the beach," or "Slaves, let us not curse life," or "Love must be reinvented." The list could be extended almost indefinitely.

Alas, Rimbaud has for so long been apotheosized as the demiurge of revolt, literary as well as metaphysical, that it is easy to overlook how very conservative a writer he actually is. In sentence after sentence, the Latin laureate at the Collège de Charleville peeps out, a cunning lamb in loud wolf's clothing. We've now pretty much lost an appreciation of rhetorical strategies—"rhetoric" is generally the first victim of would-be Rimbauds and Rimbaudettes—and so we do not immediately notice how effectively he deploys these. One among many possible examples: "*Sur toute joie pour l'étrangler j'ai fait le bond sourd de la bête féroce*" (literally: "On every joy, to strangle it, I made the muffled pounce of the fierce beast") illustrates Rimbaud's use of the inversion of subject and object known as hyperbaton. As Pierre Fontanier, the contemporary authority on rhetoric (whose work Rimbaud doubtless knew), explained in *Les figures du discours* of 1830, this figure, beloved by Boileau and Racine, lends vivid immediacy to a line of verse; even better, as his English counterpart, the rhetorician Alexander Bain, put it, hyperbaton gives "to a meditated expression the effect of an impromptu." This is in fact a quite accurate description of Rimbaud's most characteristic manner. One secret of his style is his deliberate contamination of classical prose and verse by scabrous content, which is enhanced and nullified by the very form it seeks to explode, and his studiously offhand manner intensifies this effect.

At his most desperate—maybe especially then—Rimbaud was still very much the poseur. This shows clearly in his frequent invocations of madness, or what he himself terms "sophisms of insanity" (*sophismes de la folie*). This has nothing in common with genuine mental illness but is little more than a trope, a *psychopathia litteraria*, bookish and relatively benign. Real madmen do not have visions of rubies in the mud or see mosques where factories stand; they are not seers but sufferers. Anyone who has witnessed true madness knows that it doesn't expand the consciousness or liberate the mind but rather keeps it imprisoned in dull, unending, undramatic pain. I think that Rimbaud knew this, that he was, in fact, a sophist of insanity. Does he not exult "I played fine tricks on madness"?

This does not mean, of course, that Rimbaud wasn't prey to violent inner turmoil for most of his too short life. One minor but telling example: though he suffered a neurotic dread of being conscripted, at one point he attempted, unsuccessfully, to enlist in the U.S. Navy! Robb is very good at catching and noting these multiple contradictions. Beneath the *poète maudit* of legend, Robb discloses another, far shiftier, far more human, character: not at all the "angel-headed hipster" whom the Beats idolized but a wary, shy, often eager-to-please adolescent, touchingly enthused to squire his mother and sister around London on a two-week sightseeing tour. Of this last, Robb notes with fine, rather Gallic malice that "for anyone who reveres Rimbaud as a martyr of adolescent revolt, the family holiday of July 1874 is almost obscene in its normality." Robb delineates Rimbaud's later

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incarnations with a complete absence of sentimentality; the "African" Rimbaud he depicts was a cool-headed, competent, often ruthless gunrunner (and even possibly a dabbler in the slave trade) who hoarded his earnings obsessively while in Harar and spent much time scouting out "off-shore" banks for his secret accounts. For a "seer" he was astonishingly good at business and proved to be a minor tycoon.

These disparate selves are par for the course in any discussion of Rimbaud whose celebrated axiom *Je est un autre* ("I is another") has been repeatedly invoked by his admirers. But awareness of the self's profusion was hardly unique to Rimbaud. His almost exact contemporary Robert Louis Stevenson, in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, summed up our fragmented multiplicity just as powerfully when he wrote: "I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens." This "polity" has been so painstakingly explored and by so many writers—Poe, Baudelaire, Dostoyevsky, Henry James, and Borges, to name but these—that I cannot help wondering if this insight has not by now degenerated into little more than a facile truism. Indeed, in lighter moments, I sometimes think that the best contemporary expression of this stale paradox was formulated by Ogden Nash who wrote, in fine Rimbaldian fashion,

> Tell me, O Octopus, I begs
> Is those things arms, or is they legs?
> I marvel at thee, Octopus;
> If I were thou, I'd call me Us.

Robb is hardheaded enough, but even he is not proof against the gauzy penumbra that envelops his hero and sometimes he falls into unwitting silliness. Thus, he can claim that Rimbaud and Verlaine were the "Adam and Eve of homosexuality"(!) or that Rimbaud was "devising a new life for himself and Verlaine that would help to revolutionize poetry and, eventually, sexual morality," as though prior to that sordid and tortured liaison, men had not fallen in love with men, nor women with women. As for "revolutionizing poetry," Robb himself notes elsewhere that Rimbaud's influence has been considered by many—and by Mallarmé, in particular—as destructive of French literature. From our present vantage point it is hard to dispute Mallarmé. With very few exceptions—in France, Claudel, Cendrars, and René Char; in America, Hart Crane—the children of Rimbaud's revolution have been mostly drastically befuddled airheads; a "revolution" that peters out in the flaccid verbal doodles of John Ashbery or the gaseous maunderings of Jorie Graham has to be flawed at the root.

Despite the evidence he himself amasses, Robb occasionally glosses over the consequences of Rimbaud's destructive legacy, or perhaps he wants to have it both ways: the poet as surly destroyer *and* patron saint. In any case he strikes a false note when at the end of the biography he attempts an accommodation:

> For most readers, Rimbaud's poetry remained a curious outpost of late Romanticism until the 1930s; but even after its conscription by academic curricula and Ministers of Culture, it retained its avant-garde aura. An icon to the Beat poets, the students of May 1968, intellectual rock musicians and the gay movement, Rimbaud has done more than any other writer to import Romantic ideals into the distant twentieth century.

Notwithstanding such lapses, Robb is usually skeptical both about Rimbaud's followers and the poet himself. Thus, in detailing Rimbaud's obsession with bad smells, which infuse his verse from first to last, Robb comments, "After a hundred days in the city, Rimbaud was a semi-stagnant eco-system with its own atmosphere and verminous population." And rather than plodding, yet again, into an excursus on synaesthesia, Robb notes that the source of Rimbaud's famous vowel-sonnet was probably the Parisian musician Ernest Cabaner

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who taught Rimbaud to play the piano by associating each note of an octave with a vowel or a color. Robb also notes the place of traditional French folk songs in several of Rimbaud's lyrics, and this is good if only because it shows that this poet, seemingly *sui generis*, sprang from an actual historical and social context.

The later career proves particularly rich in new and sometimes surprising glimpses. Robb recounts Rimbaud's passion for languages, which he learned for purposes of business; in addition to English and German, he acquired Arabic and several of the local dialects of Abyssinia. His interest in things Arabic and Islamic was such that he was often spotted in Harar offering idiosyncratic commentaries on the Qur'ân to a circle of bemused Muslims; Robb notes it was only because the Muslims regarded him as a "lunatic" (and thus beyond the strictures of the law) that he was allowed to continue these sessions with impunity, though he was once set upon and beaten with sticks by an indignant crowd. There has been some speculation, largely unfounded, that Rimbaud converted to Islam. On his deathbed he is said to have repeatedly mumbled, in Arabic, *Allâhu karîm* ("God is generous"), a pious ejaculation which Muslims resort to *in extremis*. As Robb observes, the hidden influence of Frédéric Rimbaud, Arthur's ever-absent father, may be discernible in connection with things Arabic. The father had served in the French conquest of Algeria where he acquired a lifelong fascination with Islam and Arab life; he later produced a "parallel-text translation" of the Qur'ân, as well as a collection of "Arab jokes." During the Algerian campaign Captain Rimbaud filed meticulous field reports (now lost) in which he apparently described with gusto the vicissitudes of desert life and war. Fifty years later, the last formal writing which his son accomplished also took the form of reports, this time on his explorations.

By drawing attention to the African writings, as well as by analyzing Rimbaud's extensive (and quite pedestrian) later correspondence, Robb reconstructs the obscure denouement of the poet's career, with all its attendant agonies: recurrent illness, delirium, gangrene, and the amputation of one leg, among other calamities.

As a person Rimbaud appears to have been at once crassly provincial and coldly manipulative. As Robb reveals, he was not only an implacable enemy but a high-risk friend. His idea of a prank was to ejaculate into an unsuspecting friend's glass of milk; his notion of a pastime was to draw patterns on a café table with his own feces. Not surprisingly both the French and the Belgian police, who kept him and Verlaine under tabs, routinely described him as "the monster Raimbaud [*sic*]." Unwashed and lice-ridden, an utter stranger to table manners, gratuitously boorish, Rimbaud in Paris was never happier than when demolishing a friendly dinner party or a tottering marriage (in this case, Verlaine's). The most unregenerate of Bohemians found him intolerable and booted him out routinely.

Rimbaud wrote a number of unforgettable and brilliant poems, in verse and in prose, that retain an almost magical force, but is this really an excuse? Influenced no doubt by Robb's pungent revelations as well as his demystifying approach, I find Rimbaud's genuine accomplishments to be fewer than I once had thought. Certain poems, such as "Le bateau ivre" or the wonderful "Chercheuses de poux" and "Les poètes de sept ans," most of the sonnets, the entirety of *A Season in Hell*, perhaps several of the *Illuminations*, remain mysteriously beautiful but the bulk of the work is too often fragmented, provisional, posturing, and sophomoric. How else could it be of a poet, even a poet of genius, who forswore poetry well before his twentieth birthday? (Needless to say, the French regard the least shred or tatter relating to Rimbaud as inexpressibly precious. As a result, his collected works, swollen with letters, jottings and scraps, appear unexpectedly plump. In Robb's view, French bardolatry is such that if the bullet with which Verlaine shot Rim-

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baud in the left wrist on July 10, 1873, "ever emerges, it will probably become one of the holiest relics in modern literature.")

But the strangest and in some respects, the most grotesque, aspect of the personality of Arthur Rimbaud, as it here takes shape, is that the one person he resembled, and indeed modeled himself upon, was Vitalie Rimbaud (*née* Cuif), his grim, sourly pious, and embittered mother to whom he returned, in spite of his detestation of her, near the end of his short life. Rimbaud's odd mixture of meanness and piety, his righteousness coupled with intense self-disgust, his penury and streak of malignant spite, especially towards those who sought to befriend him, seem variations on his mother's provincial personality magnified tenfold, as though the ultimate affront he could wreak on her was to mimic her with a vengeance.

Maman Rimbaud comes off badly in most accounts. Robb remarks wittily of Rimbaud's final trip home that "in the face of such irreconcilable similarities, the reunion [with his mother] would not be easy." Whether or not this is fair, the bond between mother and son was deep and irrefragable, and it persisted even after the poet's death. Thus, eight years later, in a letter on June 9, 1899 to her daughter Isabelle—a letter not mentioned by Robb—Vitalie Rimbaud wrote:

> Yesterday I had just gotten to Mass and was still kneeling and praying when someone to whom I paid no attention came up close to me. I saw a crutch placed against the column, right under my eyes, a crutch such as poor Arthur had. I turned and was dumbfounded: it was Arthur himself, the same figure, the same age, even his face, his grayish-white skin, beardless but with a small mustache and then, missing a leg, too. This young man looked at me with unusual sympathy. Despite all my attempts I could not hold back my tears, tears of sorrow in which there was underneath something I couldn't explain.

That there is in this letter something stagy as well as sincere only accentuates the queasy affinities that obtained, even posthumously, between strange mother and stranger son.

Rimbaud is still someone whom we know all too well and yet not at all: the anarchic visionary is familiar enough, but the gunrunner and speculator, the mercenary, the African explorer, the frugal businessman, are all lesser known Rimbauds. Our ignorance of this later Rimbaud is not entirely due to the absence of adequate documentation (though that is a huge problem). Rather, the prevailing myth of the poet, his sacrosanct and well-niched urn in the columbarium of Parnassus, have hindered most attempts to illumine his life after he abandoned poetry. The French poet Yves Bonnefoy has loftily proclaimed, "Let us not read the African Rimbaud's letters to his family. Let us not try to find out whether the poet who wanted one day to 'steal fire,' sold one thing rather than another." Fortunately for us, Graham Robb has not heeded this injunction. He has shown that the "African Rimbaud" was in many ways a huge improvement over the Parisian Rimbaud, if only because the "sophisms of insanity" which plagued his youth seemed to have subsided at the last.

There are extant at least three photographs of Rimbaud taken in 1883 in Harar, and Robb includes two of them; they are self-portraits, now speckled with age and humidity. The hands are no longer those of a farmboy or a "strangler" but look wiry, competent, and adroit. Rimbaud's face is partially obscured by shadow and by the clouded emulsion of the print but still he peers aggressively forward, purposeful, and assured. Dim as the images are, the man seems to incorporate the words of his own earlier self. He looks like someone perpetually ready to embark; he looks like someone who has lived to the utmost what before he could only imagine: *La marche, le fardeau, le désert, l'ennui et la colère* ("The trek, the burden, the desert, boredom, and rage").

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Talking to oneself

by Joseph Epstein

I have been keeping a journal for more than thirty years, and if you were to ask me why I continue to do so, the best answer I can offer is that I cannot stop now. I consider scribbling a paragraph or two each morning in the notebooks that constitute my journal part of my intellectual hygiene. That the entries are made in the morning is important; I suspect that if I wrote late at night, when tired, my entries would be spiritually darker, and, I prefer to think, less true to life, or at least my life, which has been a lucky one.

As for the contents of my journal entries, they generally have to do with events, incidents, thoughts (more like notions) of the day before, though I am not above writing something genuinely vicious about something I've read, someone I've met, or some piece of gossip I've heard. A day's entry rarely runs longer than two paragraphs of six or seven sentences each, and seldom takes me more than fifteen minutes to compose. I also try to be charming, if only to charm myself. The trick, I have discovered, is not to make the keeping of a journal into a chore. My advice on journal keeping is, as Cosima Wagner neglected to instruct Richard, keep it light.

I began keeping my journal when I was thirty-three years old. I had attempted one earlier, but found that it was too filled with complaint and depression. The complaint chiefly had to do with the world, ignorant beast, not recognizing my obvious talent. But by thirty-three the rug of this complaint—a small Sarouk with a medallion pattern—had been pulled out from under me by the world's modest acceptance, and so I knocked off the complaint and the depressive tone, and on September 25, 1970 began:

> This is to be a writer's notebook. In it I intend to put down everything I find of interest about writing generally and about my own personal development and problems as a writer. Everything I put into this notebook shall be written out with a fair amount of care, for I half-hope that it will be published some day—an expectation that assumes, of course, that before I go to my grave I shall have accrued a respectable amount of fame. False modesty will not be one of this notebook's strong strains.
>
> I believe I am entitled to call myself a writer at all for two reasons: I publish with a decent regularity in almost all the O.K. American magazines; and if I did not have writing to look forward to, I could only imagine the years ahead as flat and joyless.

My earliest entries, read today, do not make me ashamed. They are about the writer's—this writer's—need for praise, about the death of an important novelist (John Dos Passos), about my own small reputation among editors, about placing and losing a $100 bet on a Detroit Lions-Chicago Bears football game. About the latter, I wrote:

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> Screwing is nice, so is food, booze I can do without, drugs scare the hell out of me—so my vice, I suppose, however inconstantly practiced, is gambling. It affects me on every level, not least the physiological. . . . Win or lose, when it's over I'm exhausted; having won, I am briefly elated; having lost, I am remorseful, though, somehow, better concentrated on my own inadequacy. It is awful and I can scarcely wait to do it again. . . .
>
> Since the ordeal of gambling is by and large unpleasant, since the money is not of primary significance (after all, thirty successive $100 wins would hardly make me a free man), what's the big attraction? I think it has something to do with the need for venturing forth, for striking out against routine, for wanting an altogether unearned, wholly illicit reward out of life. If you win, you feel that you have beat the system a little—earned easy money on your nerve, while the masses down below have to sweat in the sun for it. If you lose, well, that is a rotten shame, but at least you made the attempt. But to break even, to have geared yourself up without financial consequences—that is to know true impotence.
>
> Another thing about gambling is that it is a marvelous antidote against the most dread disease there is: fear of living.

My early entries tend to be essaylets of this kind. They are on such subjects as the political lines of magazines, the filter that choosing to become a writer places on one's experience, the pleasures as a writer of attacking the rich and famous while being oneself poor and obscure. On the latter subject, I conclude that only a versatile prose style makes this possible, and that "less democratic theory and more English prose needs to be taught in the public schools."

But soon enough I run out of these general—and generalizable—subjects, and my journal descends to the rather more personal: I write about acquiring a literary agent, about a close relative who has to go into therapy, about choosing not to do a piece on Wilhelm Reich for *The New York Times Magazine*, about an older English writer telling me that something I have written is "valuable because it is percipient." My entries are still not complaint-free. I record that "I cannot recall what it is like to have no one dependent upon me." I ask if "one ever really gets over relationships that have busted up." I wonder if one's depressions "are the few unmerciful moments of truth in one's life, and that all the rest of one's conscious life is made up of periods in which one is allowed the mercifully false notion that one has, in some loose sense, 'prospects.'" I then go on to add that "it is not permitted, for minds like my own, to delve into such matters too deeply or too long." As I wrote capping this rather dark entry, "Enough discontent and a little more civilization, please." As the writer of a journal, I was beginning to gain my tone.

Reading back in the early years of my journal, I am surprised to learn that I was better at handling some problems then than now. Insomnia, notably. I report that, after rolling around, maddeningly, for the first hour or two,

> I laze into it, luxuriate in it. I recall old relationships, the wounds and felicities they brought, think about my present situation, consider the possibilities for the future. I introspect, but in a rambling way, nothing neither systematic or deep about it. Somewhere Wm. James talks about the dues that it is necessary to pay the self, if personality's delicate economy is not to break down. During such hours as these, I pay my dues, and it is a great pleasure.

These were years, too, when I began to discover one of my forms: the "piece in which I take a subject and attempt to illuminate it in some rough way through the light of my own particular experience." I also attempt to set out my motives for accepting a writing assignment: "1. Can this be used in a book someday? 2. Is there something about the subject I really want to say? and 3. Do I need the money?," to which I add "All three questions seem to elude any

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suspicions of high motive behind my writing." Just so.

Emerson asked himself why his diary contained no jokes, and answered "because it is a soliloquy and every man is grave when alone." A sign of my deep shallowness perhaps, but not true of me. I was, even talking to myself, an ironist young. On June 6, 1971, I wrote:

> Every so often I will see a woman coming out of a high-rise or shopping on Michigan Avenue. She is generally small and good-looking, in a dark and somewhat cute-ish way. Sometimes she will be walking a small dog down Sheridan Road, or along Lake Shore Drive. "Ah," I will say to myself, upon sighting these various women, "here is the kind of girl I should now be divorced from."

On occasion I rise—or is it lapse?—into aphorism. "Five years ago I found much about life absurd; nowadays I find many of the same things merely sad. It would be good to be able to regress a little in this sphere." How's this for cut-rate La Rochefoucauld: "Vanity without foundation in either physical beauty or true talent is one of the most pathetic of human spectacles." And this, which shows perhaps too great bookishness to qualify for real originality: "To have a silly judgment from someone one cares about is to understand the accuracy of E. M. Cioran's remark that love is merely an agreement on the part of two people to overestimate each other."

In 1969 I left a job as a senior editor at *Encyclopædia Britannica* and took up a new one working with my friend Ivan Dee at Quadrangle Books, which had recently been bought—and soon thereafter wrecked—by *The New York Times*. After a little more than a year at Quadrangle, I decided to leave to write full time. My journal entry for August 6, 1970 reads:

> Today is to be my last day at Quadrangle Books, and hence the end of still another short segment of my professional life. As an editor in publishing I think, overall, I have been a failure. Not because the publishing business is corrupt—though in many ways it is—not because I thought myself too good for the job, or my standards too high, or my sensibility too fine. No, I have been a failure because of my inability any longer to work up a modicum of excitement for a cooperative venture, or for that matter for anything that I don't find useful for my own writing. It is in this sense, then, that there is truth in the remark that a writer, an authentic writer, always cheats his boss.

Then an odd thing happens: a hiatus of sixteen months occurs during which I do not write a word in my journal. When I return to my scribbling, I do not explain why I left off—and even now cannot recall why I did so. Looking at this gap today, I feel about it as I might a bruise on my leg the origin of which I cannot remember. But when I return, on December 15, 1972, I decide that this journal is "worth keeping—and keeping up—as a record of my various states of mind." I then go on to describe my current state of mind as "fatigued but tiring fast." The reason is that I am more than halfway out to sea in my first book, about which I descant a bit on the difference between writing pieces and writing at much greater length, concluding that the latter allows so much more time "for confusion, self-hatred, and deep doubt."

My not being able to recapture why I didn't write in my journal for more than a year reminds me of another of the reasons I am grateful for having kept a journal. Doing so is perhaps the greatest of all aids to memory, especially as one grows older and life begins to seem more than a touch dreamy. Impressions of places visited on foreign travel became a regular feature of my journalizing, and they become the only hard evidence I have that I spent, say, a week in Ghent. At some point, I begin to note each movie I see and concert I attend; at the back of each notebook I make a list of the books I had read and the date on which I finished reading them. I have fairly often

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gone back to check on these various items of which my journal is the only record, especially now that I have reached the stage of memory where I can see *The Pelican Brief* as if afresh every two years without remembering anything of its plot from my last viewing.

In my early years, I wasn't at all bad at marking down my own shortcomings. One among them was the habit of what I call "moral vanity," which entails the "need always to appear on the correct side of every issue, relationship, etc. On the way to wriggling myself into the morally correct position, I am quite prepared to do the selfish, the brutal, or otherwise immoral thing." This observation was made in connection with an article I wrote attacking the politics of people who were in fact my friends, and the entry closes by my noting: "A case, clearly, of my cutting off someone else's nose to spite my own face." One of the few regrets in rereading one's journal is the realization that one was sometimes a lot smarter then than now.

In early 1973 the great intellectual event of my life occurred, my meeting, through Saul Bellow, Edward Shils, the most extraordinary human being I have known or ever expect to know. Later in my journals I noted various of his amusing remarks and observations. I only wish I had, Boswell-like, recorded more. When the son of a friend of his at Cambridge committed suicide, leaving a note saying that he found life meaningless, Edward responded, rather angrily at the waste, "Of course it is meaningless, but most of us are fortunately too busy to dwell on its meaninglessness."

I am pleased with myself for being intelligent enough, at thirty-six, to know that I was in the company of a great man. On April 13, 1973, I wrote:

> Dinner last night with Edward Shils . . . . For me E. S. is a most pleasant reminder that the intellectual life is still possible, if one stands ready to shuck off certain temptations: joining factions, seeking publicity, reneging on unrenegable principles. Hard to do in our day, but still the only way. E. S.'s face, which late at night, after a long day at the desk and in the classroom, can become quite beautiful, radiant with wit and strength of character, is an indication that such austerities do not go altogether unrewarded.

On June 5, 1973, a sloppily written entry begins: "Chicago essences—a Lincoln Continental Mark (I believe) III driven by a white pimp in a striped shirt—three black women in back down Sheridan Road at (roughly 3:00 A.M.). God bless him, too."

After a paragraph break, I add: "As may be clear from handwriting and syntax, the author is reasonably drunk—an aberration, to put it calmly." This is the only record I have of having of DWW, or drunk while writing, and it shows.

I also used my journal for mentioning the possibility of literary essays I might write, few of which I actually got round to writing. One is about the peculiar memory of writers, or memory shaped by imagination, which I claim to be "one of the most magnificent of instruments of intellection" but "not to be trusted for accuracy." Another is for a piece about what calls up what I refer to as "transient emotions." Yet another is occasioned by first reading Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*, which suggests to me the subject of what happens when women act quite as brutally as men in the sexual realm. After sketching in a paragraph or so on this, I write that this "would be an almost purely literary essay, or one that starts from literature and goes, as most literary studies should, to life."

Less pretentiously—pretentious, *moi*?—I sometimes note small items in my journal, simply because I feel they oughtn't to go unrecorded. The other day, visiting the graves of my parents, I passed and noted in my journal a gravestone that read, "Rex Salem Wilk, 1930–1992, A Gentle Man." So much suggestion in those last three words. A neighbor dies, a woman weighing perhaps five-hundred pounds, and in my journal I wonder what mortuary complications

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this will present. I also write down, shamelessly, what I take to be my own witticisms. While listening to the Romanian pianist Radu Lupu, I wrote in my concert program that "the Rumanians are the wogs of Europe," which I wrote again in my journal, adding that I think it a remark that my friend Edward, with his unending interest in nationalities, would have enjoyed.

Many years earlier, an older man who lives on my block, seems, I report in my journal, "askew: his evening paper was not properly folded, his coat was open, he did not seem quite in control of his open umbrella." When I came in closer range, it was clear he was drunk. "Sir," he said, and at first I thought he was going to upbraid me for something, "how would you like me to suck your peter?" When I ask if he's all right, he reports that he is upset. But before entering his building, he turns to say, "If you want me to do it, I will." I conclude: "In fine, a nice reminder of the madness that sometimes lurks beneath the tranquil appearance of life nowadays—and no doubt always."

Recording the deaths of relatives and friends has become a more regular part of my morning journalistical task. At sixty-four, I am not yet in the condition of having more dead than alive friends, but soon it may be close, then tilt the other way—that is, if I am lucky enough to stay alive myself. At my age, I can no longer achieve dying young, which is, as we say in Chicago, fine by me. I especially feel the need to record the deaths of relatives, friends, and acquaintances whose death may not be noted in newspaper obituaries or in memorial services. It cannot matter much to them, I realize. Yet to me it matters a lot, though it is perhaps mere writer's vanity: no one, I feel, should depart the planet without a few of my sentences to accompany him.

As for departures, what, when I make my own, will become of this journal? Who will want it? I still hope, of course, for some form of posthumous publication. I have tried to drop as many names as possible in it, for a namey journal can be greatly amusing. But I have met mostly artists and intellectuals, a few politicians, but not enough people from the great world to give my name-dropping proper zing. No royalty, no movie stars appear in my pages. Much as I should have liked to have done, I cannot report that the Duchess of Windsor goosed me at Ascot or that Grace Kelly promised to return to the screen if I would write a scenario for her. I am more in the league of recording that Irving Howe once told me he never got over the fact that, behind his back, a woman intellectual in his circle had described him as "another Jew-boy in a hurry." My journal is also notably un-sexy, both figuratively and literarily. Unlike Edmund Wilson in his journals, I do not report on my bonking, domestic and otherwise. Nor do I report on sexual fantasies, which for me would, I have to report, cover the "otherwise" in my previous sentence. A bit of occasional gossip on sexual alliances or someone announcing he or she is homosexual is about as far I go, and less and less of this crops up in recent years.

The thirty-three notebooks that constitute my full journal must by now run to nearly a million words. To the question who is ever likely ever to publish them, the short—and I suspect definitive—answer is: no one. Edmund Wilson is perhaps the last writer to have his journal published so extensively—in six volumes, one each for five decades and another devoted to his life at his family's Talcottville house in upstate New York. I much enjoyed reading the Wilson journals as they appeared, though they were not without their longueurs: exceedingly boring patches of landscape writing, trial runs for his not very engaging fiction, and the adventures of what he at one point refers to as his "large pink prong," which are a lot less amusing than those of the Pink Panther. Wilson's journals are best when he writes about his meetings with other artists and intellectuals; and since he never for a moment seems to have felt himself intellectually inferior to anyone—not to André Malraux, to Isaiah Berlin, and cer-

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tainly not to John F. Kennedy—he is usually quite good at taking their measure.

Edmund Wilson aside, everyone who has ever written a journal or diary at some point seems to have had doubts about the usefulness of doing so. "Possibly," writes Ned Rorem, in *Lies*, the most recently published volume of his diary, "the Diary is a red herring. The author seeks to guide readers away from the essential, which even he ignores." The Romanian writer Iosif Hechter, who wrote under the name of Mihail Sebastian, in the best modern journal I have read in many years, wrote that, "In the end, there is something artificial in the very fact of keeping a private diary; nowhere does the act of writing seem more false. It lacks the excuse of being a means of communicating just as it lacks any immediate necessity." Jules Renard put the matter more straightforwardly: "What is the good of these notebooks? No one tells the truth, not even the one who writes it down."

We know all autobiographies are public lies. Are journals, then, nothing more than private lies? "What a pack of lies intimate journals are," declared Charles Ritchie, a Canadian diplomatist who kept a journal during the war years, "particularly if one tries too hard to be truthful." I have just read—quickly, the more quickly the further I got into them—the published journals of Alfred Kazin, a writer who had all the deep humorlessness and badgering moralizing of Thoreau with none of his feeling for nature, and almost every word in them is devoted to self-justification (no small project), self-dramatizing, and attacks on enemies. Truth, like Godot on stage, never appears on page.

I wonder if those journals aren't best that steer clear of deep innermost thoughts, which probably are better worked out through formal writing or in works of literary art. When Alan Bennett began keeping his diary in 1974, he decided straightaway not to record his emotions and thoughts, because "they make you cringe when you read them again." Byron felt rather the same, claiming he couldn't read his own journal over, noting: "If I am sincere with myself (but I fear one lies more to one's self than to anyone else) every page should confute, refute, and utterly abjure its predecessor." I seem to have solved this problem in my own journal by having almost no innermost thoughts, let alone a subconscious; as for my unconscious, I suspect it might best be described the way Edward Shils, as noted in my journal, once described Mexican food: "mostly mud and peppers."

Despite all the drawbacks that journals present, they also provide advantages no other form of literature offers. Mihail Sebastian's account in his journal of the events in Romania between 1937 and 1945 has a day-to-day freshness that neither autobiography nor written history can ever hope to capture. Along with filling in history, in the manner of Sebastian, a journal is often the best way to encounter a strong mind. I've recently read an English translation of a selection from *The Journals of Jules Renard* (1864–1910), which is filled with useful information of a kind that is unlikely to have fitted into any other form. Nice to learn from Renard, who was in a position to know, that the poetry of Mallarmé is "untranslatable, even in French." Or that "any writer who is polite, who acknowledges a letter or the receipt of a book, does not believe himself to be famous." And, in the spirit of its taking one to know one: "The profession of letters is the only one in which one can make no money without being ridiculous."

Although Jules Renard wrote novels and for the theater, he is among those writers whose claim on posterity—of which he noted: "Why should people be less stupid tomorrow than they are today?"—is owing almost wholly to his journals. The Goncourt brothers, Edmond and Jules, are two others. André Gide's novels today seem less interesting than do his journals. The same holds for Harold Nicolson's diaries over his rather thin histories and biographies. Without his journal, we should not have known of the high quality of Delacroix's mind. Another painter, Benjamin Robert Haydon,

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would be unknown today without his journals and their valuable comments on his more famous contemporaries: Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Hazlitt, Lamb & Co. Alice James's diary is her proper claim on the attention of posterity. Kierkegaard's journals, while of lesser importance than his major philosophical and theological works, embellish, enhance, and help explain that work, and thus have a key place in his oeuvre. Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, or notebooks, which run to to 4,562 pages, hold an even more central place in that poet's life. "The *Zibaldone*," writes Iris Origo in her fine biography, "is Leopardi himself." Tolstoy made a similar claim—"My diaries are me"—but in his case they aren't; they were chiefly him in his mood of self-flagellation. Filled with accounts of his youthful whoring and carousing, he showed them to his young wife—was there ever a genius more stupid than Tolstoy?—which got their marriage off on just the wrong note.

The young Countess Tolstoy was clearly not the ideal reader for her husband's diary. But who is the ideal reader for a journal or diary? Harold Nicolson laid it down that "the purely private diary becomes too self-centered and morbid. One should have a remote, but not too remote, audience." Nicolson thought this would be one's (still unborn) great-grandson. Chips Channon, the Chicago-born English politician, was one of the great snobs of the past century. He adored royalty, and once, over-stimulated by having two actual queens in his house, got so drunk that he had no memory of the event. "I sometimes wonder why I keep a diary at all," he wrote. "Is it to relieve my feelings? Console my old age? Or to dazzle my descendants?" Dawn Powell, who had no descendants beyond her retarded son, wrote that "The reason I write is because there is no one to talk to and I might as well build up a completely private life."

In the ideal journal or diary, one is talking to oneself but with the understanding that others are welcome to eavesdrop, after one is dead. Eavesdropping would normally be the last thing one would think one would want, given the ostensibly private nature of journals and diaries.[1] In melodramas, it used always to be a serious violation to read, without her awareness, a young woman's diary. Nowadays they try to publish them and as soon as possible.

Some of the most interesting entries from published diaries and journals now appear in a splendid anthology titled *The Assassin's Cloak*,[1] edited by Irene and Alan Taylor. The Taylors are Scots, both of whom have put in time working in libraries. Their title derives from the entry of one of their book's most interesting contributors, William Soutar, a Scottish poet whose life was brought to a too early close, after a lengthy invalidism owing to a spinal disease, at age forty-five. "A diary," Soutar wrote, "is an assassin's cloak which we wear when we stab a comrade in the back with a pen."

The Taylors have also found a useful method for organizing an astonishingly large and multivarious body of material. They have set out entries, from the seventeenth through the late twentieth century, organized chronologically by day through the three-hundred-sixty-six-day calendar year, so that for January 10 one gets entries written on that day in their own diaries and journals by Henry Crabb Robinson (1824), the Rev. Francis Kilvert (1872), Sir Allen "Tommy" Lascelles (1914), Count Harry Kessler (1920), Chips Channon (1945), Jean Cocteau (1953), Roy Jenkins (1979), Alan Clark (1984), and the rock musician Brian Eno (1995). This organization gives a nice feeling for the variety of human response to private and public experience both in and through time.

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1 Perhaps this is the place to touch on the distinction between a journal and a diary: the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* declares that a journal deals with events, thoughts, and the rest "in more detail than a diary," but this feels to me very much one of those distinctions without a difference.

2 *The Assassin's Cloak: An Anthology of the World's Greatest Diarists*, edited by Irene and Alan Taylor; Canongate Books, 704 pages, £25.

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"Are all Brits bisexual," a recent cartoon in *The New Yorker* has one woman asking another, "or just the ones who publish their diaries?" From *The Assassin's Cloak* we can now answer confidently that only half the Brits are bisexual and of these all publish their diaries. The comprehensiveness of the Taylors' anthology is impressive. The only large names left out of this excellent book that I know are those of Renard, Edmund Wilson, and Ned Rorem; there is only a single entry by Emerson and too many by Thoreau. In recompense, a number of the contributors to the Taylors' anthology are new to me, among them W. N. P. Barbellion, Roy Strong, Etty Hillesum, Joan Wyndham, Charles Ritchie, all of whom wrote consistently interesting things in their journals and diaries.

What impresses about this assemblage of journal and diary entries is the sheer richness of human possibility. In 1644 in London, Samuel Pepys goes out to attend the hanging of a man named Turner ("A comely-looked man he was, and kept his countenance to the end: I was sorry to see him"). In 1821 in Ravenna, Lord Byron goes out to make love ("Somewhat perilous, but not disagreeable"). In 1978 in New York, Andy Warhol, despite a lot of dates, decides to "stay home and dye my eyebrows." Different folks, as the old saying has it, different strokes.

Some diarists seem to get things wonderfully wrong in the passion of the moment. Lord Longford, for example, is certain that Lady Diana Spencer is perfect for her husband, and at her marriage to the Prince of Wales he writes that it will bring "lasting benefit to the nation in a renewed sense of unity." (Yeah, as the kids say, right, sure!) Beatrice Webb has a very poor impression of her future husband Sidney on their first meeting. Others get it wrong not sometimes but every time: see any entry by Simone de Beauvoir on America. Still others are amusingly wrong, such as Stendhal, who thought that "an efficacious remedy for love" was to "eat peas." (I haven't actually kitchen-tested this.) Stephen Spender has a taste for telling mildly demeaning stories about himself in his journal, one about his flatulence, another about being recognized by a clerk at the Seattle Airport as "a near-celebrity." The editors use a number of entries from the diaries of Virginia Woolf, which don't, cumulatively, redound to her greater glory, but instead show her to be rivalrous, anti-Semitic, intensely in need of praise, even for that most praise-guzzling of animals, the writer.

One of the especial pleasures of reading journals and diaries is that one gets to glimpse historically interesting experience freshly recorded—almost on the scene. The English actor Charles Macready, in 1833, hears Paganini play at Drury Lane. Joan Wyndham recounts being set upon by a (predictably) drunken Dylan Thomas in a cab: "It was rather like being embraced by an intoxicated octopus. I tried to tell myself I was being kissed by a great poet but it was a relief when the taxi finally stopped." Noël Coward, after going to a Beatles concert, reports that "they were professional, had a certain guileless charm, and stayed on not too long." But the audience gets to him:

> Personally I should have liked to take some of those squealing maniacs and cracked their heads together. I am all for audiences going mad with enthusiasm after a performance, but not incessantly during the performance so that there ceases to be a performance.

Alone among literary works, journals and diaries do not benefit from revision. Chips Channon claimed never to reread his diaries and mentions what a mistake it is to dictate a diary, which tends to cut down on its spontaneity and scandalousness: "What is more dull than a discreet diary? One might just as well have a discreet soul." Cocteau advises the editor of his diary to "cut what I jot down for reference and the repetitions which occur because I don't remember if I've already described the things I've described," but otherwise to let 'er rip and print what he wrote. Editing for libel and slander

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needs be done in some journals and diaries—some of the best, my guess is.

Dullness is a regular worry of all diarists. "My life is really too empty for a diarist," Evelyn Waugh writes. "The morning post, the newspaper, the crossword, gin." Fanny Burney, in 1768, writes: "Alas, alas! my poor Journal! how dull, unentertaining, uninteresting thou art!" and wishes for a journal-worthy adventure to record. Two centuries later Tallulah Bankheard remarks: "Only good girls keep diaries. Bad girls don't have time." The perfect diary entry in the dullness sweepstakes belongs to Kafka, who on June 1, 1912, records: "Wrote nothing."

Journals and diaries are often nowadays used as part of psychotherapy. One wonders about the value of doing so. Some benefits may accrue from setting out, in the plainest, least self-dramatizing prose, one's troubles, if only to gain greater clarity about them. But it makes for dreary reading. Kafka, a great writer, is, for precisely this reason, a dreary diarist; when not complaining, he is endlessly analyzing his weaknesses. "One stops being a child," Cesare Pavese wrote in his diary, "when one realizes that telling one's troubles does not make it better." Yet it remains true that, in troublous times, people tend to diarize. (I hope I may be forgiven this back-formation verb, but I take my inspiration here from Evelyn Waugh, who, in one of his diary entries, availed himself of "to lesbianise.") Perhaps the largest single category of diary entries in *The Assassin's Cloak* is those written during, and having to do with, World War II.

A journal provides one with that best of audiences, that most loyal supporter, that closest and most understanding and greatest good-hearted of friends—oneself. One can say to it things one wouldn't dare to say to anyone else. James Lees-Milne, contemplating a passport photograph of himself at the age of sixty-nine, writes: "My God, how absolutely hideous I have become. Sad really, when you think. As long as I keep clean. I suppose all I can do is maintain that one standard." One can hazard speculations in a journal or diary one wouldn't dare write in, so to say, the public prints. In his diary, Noël Coward blames the death of Marilyn Monroe on Arthur Miller: "Poor silly creature. I am convinced that what brought her to that final foolish gesture [her suicide] was a steady diet of intellectual pretentiousness pumped into her over the years by Arthur Miller and 'The Method.'" Coward is perhaps the most unfailingly charming diarist of all, a man who, after a splendidly rich life, looked forward to oblivion: "I cannot really feel that oblivion will be disappointing. Life and love and fame and fortune can all be disappointing, but not dear old oblivion. Hurrah for eternity!"

Finally, though, there is something slightly deceitful about keeping a journal or diary, especially if one never shows it to anyone else. James Lees-Milne notes in his diary that "if a man has no constant lover who shares his soul as well as his body he must have a diary—a poor substitute but better than nothing." The excellent W. N. P. Barbellion, an English naturalist, takes this a step further when, in his journal, he writes that, for an engaged or married man, there is something suggesting infidelity in keeping such a "super-confidante," and he wonders if his own "journal habit [isn't] slowly corrupting my character."

Keeping a journal or a diary, once begun in earnest, becomes more an addiction than a habit. I cannot now imagine abandoning mine. I continue to scribble in it each morning, living my life at a second remove, with nothing in it quite real until it has been scrawled out in my increasingly poor handwriting. "When all is said and done," Siegfried Sassoon wrote, "a good life is better than keeping a good diary." No doubt, but please note that Sassoon makes this observation in his diary. You may think this essay has at last come to its conclusion, but it will really only be done tomorrow morning, when, in my journal, I write, "Finished essay on Journals and Diaries. Am, as usual, uncertain of its quality."

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How to murder a Bolivian boy

by Anthony Daniels

There is nothing so foolish that some philosopher has not said it, and there is nothing so evil that some bioethicist has not proposed it. Indeed, the entire purpose of the new discipline of bioethics often seems to be the finding of bad reasons for worse conclusions. Bioethicists are ever on the lookout for new categories of human beings to kill or to allow to be killed.

The most famous bioethicists live and advance their careers by using the logic of the arms race or that of the transgressive artist. The painter who incorporates elephant dung into his pictures of religious subjects soon finds that there are painters who use nothing but excrement as a medium, and he is therefore obliged to scour his imagination for ever more obscene methods and subjects if he wishes to remain a member of the avant-garde. In a world of soundbites, moreover, there is no point in being only moderately offensive; there must be no holds barred if that notoriety which is indistinguishable from success in our world of shallow sensation is to be achieved. A bioethicist is unlikely, therefore, to reach the top of the greasy academic pole by suggesting that the Hippocratic injunction "First do no harm" is the beginning of wisdom for doctors. If he wants to get on, he must be prepared to decimate a countryside, at least in theory.

There is little doubt, of course, that the accelerating Prometheanism of modern medicine has generated ethical dilemmas faster than it has improved the quality of life. Patients with totally incapacitating head injuries who, fifty years ago, would have died, are now kept alive indefinitely by artificial means. Organs can be transferred from one person to another; prenatal diagnosis and in vitro fertilization are now routine; human cloning, parthenogenesis, and various forms of genetic engineering are just around the corner. Financial constraints and the vastly increased costs of medical treatment, moreover, appear to make it morally necessary for doctors to choose courses of action based not upon what is best for individual patients, but upon what will produce the most good for the money spent. In a world of inevitably limited resources, is the doctor not responsible for his husbandry of those resources?

In *Culture of Death: The Assault on Medical Ethics in America*,[1] Wesley J. Smith, an attorney for the Anti-Euthanasia Task Force, mounts a spirited defence of the traditional Hippocratic code: that doctors should do no harm, that they should never kill, that they should treat each patient with equal concern and consideration no matter his personal qualities, and that they should never presume to ask themselves whether their patient's life is worth living. Mr. Smith's fundamental point, which he illustrates with

1 *Culture of Death: The Assault on Medical Ethics in America*, by Wesley J. Smith; Encounter Books, 285 pages, $23.95.

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a wealth of individual cases, is that once these tenets have been abandoned in the name of a supposedly higher imperative, we are already some way down the slippery slope that leads to earthly perdition.

The main criticism of the traditional Hippocratic code is that it leads either to an absurd and cruel inflexibility or worse still (from the point of view of academics) to an inconsistency that destroys its intellectual credibility. For example, most doctors have refrained at some time from prescribing antibiotics to an old and terminally ill patient who has secondarily contracted bronchopneumonia (a disease known as "old man's friend," because it leads to an easeful death), even if such antibiotics would prolong his life by a few hours or days. The doctors have estimated on their patients' behalf that the additional short period of life is not worth having, especially when put beside the missed opportunity of a mostly painless death. It is not really true, therefore, that doctors never, under any circumstances, pass judgment on the worth of their patients' life. On the contrary, when they struggle with all the technological ingenuity at their disposal to keep someone alive who is clearly beyond hope of anything more than merely mechanical existence, they are liable to be accused of heartless officiousness. Perhaps the most celebrated instance of this occurred during the last illness of General Franco, when Spanish doctors connected the Caudillo to every conceivable life-support machine. The manner of his death alerted the world to the astonishing, if not always entirely beneficial, powers of modern medicine.

The criticism of the Hippocratic code, therefore, is that it fails to meet every case. It has been the self-imposed task of philosophers (who are increasingly insinuating themselves into hospitals and clinics) to find a new intellectual foundation for medical ethics. And in a world grown ever more crassly utilitarian and impatient of any activity that has no obvious practical application, the rise of bioethics came just at the right time to rescue the careers of moral philosophers, for, as the fetuses are aborted and the life support machines are turned off, no one will ever again be able to say that they, the moral philosophers, have no practical effect on the world.

Moral philosophers promised to deliver doctors from the self-contradictions into which the Hippocratic code led them: they would find the indubitable Cartesian proposition from which all ethical decisions would follow syllogistically. Let the moral philosophers into the intensive care unit and all would be, if not light exactly, at least intellectually consistent. What greater benefit could there be than that?

But, as Mr. Smith shows, an appearance of philosophic consistency often requires the most brutal of conclusions. Just as in Britain the very discomforts of the National Health Service are taken as evidence of its social justice (what, after all, could be fairer than that everyone should have to wait months or years for his operation?), so there are people who are so impressed by the repugnance of a conclusion that they are inclined to suppose that the reasoning that led to it must have been sound. There is no smoke without fire, and there is no ethically repugnant principle without logic.

The most famous exponent of the culture of death, the bioethicist *pur et dur* as it were, whom Mr. Smith quotes more often and extensively than any other, is Professor Peter Singer of Princeton University. He is both typical and influential, and stands for all that Mr. Smith abhors. Singer's train of thought is to him what the cliff is to a lemming—with this difference, that while the lemming throws itself over, Singer throws other people over. He is the philosophic massacrer of the innocents, compared with whose suggestions Swift's *Modest Proposal* was modest indeed.

Singer has one great disadvantage as a moral philosopher: he writes as if he has heard of human beings, but never actually met any. In his search for the objective Archimedean point from which all solutions to ethical dilemmas may be levered, he

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alights upon the proposition that all sentient beings are morally equal. Their pains and their pleasures are all to count in the felicific calculus of whether an act is good or bad, permissible, forbidden, or obligatory, and human beings are not to be granted special status merely because they are human: not a sparrow falls, it seems, but Professor Singer takes it into his all-encompassing calculations. And the welfare of an unknown child in Outer Mongolia is to weigh as heavily with us as the welfare of the child next door, from the moral point of view, because they are alike in their capacity to suffer and to enjoy. Geographical distance from us is morally beside the point. Presumably the Outer Mongolian is supposed to reciprocate by being as concerned about children near to Professor Singer as about those in the yurt next door.

Singer half-recognizes that, in a world of 6 billion people, so Olympian a standpoint is likely to impose a strain on most people. "Perhaps," he writes with a disarming and unaccustomed degree of uncertainty, "a viable ethic must allow us a moderate degree of partiality for ourselves, our family, and our friends." We may picture the scene: Professor Singer is proposing to the woman whom he wishes to marry. "Darling," he says, "I have decided that you are the person towards whom I should like it to be morally permissable to show a moderate degree of partiality." What decent, upright woman could resist such an overture? Unfortunately, Singer fails to recognize that the allowance of even this milk-and-water partiality (to say nothing of a more realistic allowance for what human beings are actually like) completely destroys the very basis of his philosophy.

When it comes to public affairs, Singer is not so much Descartes or Archimedes as Mrs. Jellyby. His Left-Bank-of-the-Borioboola-Ghaism follows from the principle (learned at the feet of the Oxford philosopher Jonathan Glover) that we are as morally responsible for the consequences of the omissions as for those of our acts: indeed, there is no difference between an act and an omission. Thus a man who doesn't do all in his power to prevent illness or starvation he knows to be happening on the other side of the globe, but chooses instead to go to a first-class restaurant, is actually guilty of murder. According to Singer, it is the duty of every decent, moral person to devote every single cent of his disposable income, after his necessities have been met, to relieving the poverty and suffering of the world.

There are one or two difficulties in the way of this rather strenuous philosophy. The first is that the distinction between necessity and luxury is not altogether clear, even to Professor Singer. The blurb of his book, *The Ethical Life*, states that he lives in New York City, where accommodation is notoriously not cheap. Could he not live somewhere more economical and donate the difference to, say, the elimination of river blindness in Burkina Faso? According to his own principles, is not Professor Singer a self-confessed blinder of blacks?

Second, his assumption that it is easy to do unequivocal good with one's donations, and that therefore the more one gives, the more good one does, is staggering in its ignorance of the world. Professor Singer believes that, if it costs $1 to feed a man for a week in a starving country, a donation of $100 will feed one-hundred men. There is only one solution to Professor Singer's state of arrested development: a five-minute visit to Kinshasa Airport.

Let us leave aside the fact that by far the greatest epidemic of arsenic poisoning in the history of the world has been brought about in Bangladesh by the UNICEF-funded drilling of thousands of boreholes into contaminated water (poison a baby: buy a UNICEF Christmas card). Let us consider Africa, the poorest of all the continents, and therefore the greatest object of Singer-Jellyby types' concern. It is an almost indisputable fact, now accepted by the principal donors themselves, that aid to Tanzania (which for a time was greater per capita than to any other African state) financed the removal by force of three-quarters of its rural population into

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collectivized villages by its local little despot, a trauma from which it has still not fully recovered. In other words, aid of the type recommended by Singer actually made possible a great crime, and Tanzania would have been much better off had it not received a cent of it. It is possible, moreover, that several civil wars in Africa—for example, in the Sudan—have been greatly prolonged by foreign aid. The little old ladies who raise money at church fetes are therefore, by Singer's reckoning, mass murderers.

With regard to general culture, Singer is not so much Descartes or Archimedes or Mrs. Jellyby, he is Attila the Hun. He is a true barbarian, who does not see the point of civilization. In an effective but dishonest rhetorical maneuver, he several times cites a luxurious meal in an expensive restaurant as an example of frivolous expenditure that could and should be put to humanitarian purposes such as feeding the hungry. Luxurious meals have, of course, frequently been used as symbols of moral turpitude. For example, in one Chekhov short story, there is a description of a long banquet organized by a country district's gentry, who eat far more than anyone could possible want to assuage their hunger, in order to raise money for relief of the famine raging around them. But the geographical proximity of the starving to the banquet surely does make a symbolic difference: to eat a good meal in New York while there is hunger in Ethiopia is not at all the same thing. And the symbolic difference could hardly exist unless there were a moral one.

If all expenditure beyond that necessary for one's own subsistence is tantamount to murder, it is not only luxurious eating that would be impermissible according to Singer's Calvinist utilitarianism. All artistic, scientific, and intellectual endeavor whatever that was not directed at the relief of hunger and poverty would have to be abandoned as mere callous self-indulgence. Indeed, if Singer or his philosophy had been in charge down the ages, man would still be living in the caves: for hunger and deprivation have always accompanied the rise to civilization. No Bach cantatas or Sistine Chapel for Professor Singer; for him it is strictly grub first, then culture. There is one real benefit that the implementation of his scheme would bring about: no one would buy his books, since philosophy is, *ex hypothesi*, a murderously self-indulgent pursuit. To buy a Singer book is to murder a baby in Bolivia who might have been saved by the diversion of its cost to medical treatment there. Since Singer's books have sold by the hundreds of thousands, he has clearly been responsible for untold numbers of deaths. He should withdraw his books from the market at once.

The expensive comforts of modern medicine should not be available to us, according to Singer's philosophy, at least until they are available also to the last Eritrean peasant. And it is our moral duty should we fall ill of a disease that can be cured or relieved only by expensive treatment to forgo it in the name of universal equity.

It is hardly surprising that when a reasoner such as Singer turns his attention to bioethical questions he should arrive at pitiless conclusions. The man who wants us selflessly to devote our lives and labor to the welfare of hundreds of millions of people whom we have never met and never could meet is like the fifth horseman of the apocalypse when it comes to the people—babies and old folk—next door. Instinctive revulsion to the positions he adopts might give pause to a lesser man than Singer, but he has more faith in his premises and his deductions therefrom than in the wisdom of the ages. He is a very modern man.

It was his discovery that men treated sentient beings abominably—especially animals raised for food—that caused him to lose his equilibrium. Starting from the premise that it was wrong to inflict suffering without good cause, he came too swiftly to the utilitarian conclusion that this was the only possible wrong. If a being were not capable of self-conscious suffering, it could be done no wrong. A new-born baby is not capable of such suffering, and therefore infanticide

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is permissible. The following beautiful thought occurred to him:

> To take the lives of [infants], without their consent, is not to thwart their desires for the future. Killing a snail or a day-old infant does not thwart any desires of this kind, because snails and newborn infants are incapable of such desires.

Ontogeny follows phylogeny: at birth, man is a mollusc. Admittedly, Singer finds contingent utilitarian reasons for not doing away with baby, if that is what one feels like; for it so happens that there are many couples who would like to adopt it, and to kill it is therefore to deprive them of the satisfaction of their desires. But there is no inherent objection to infanticide: if potential adoptive parents should cease to exist, unwanted baby had better beware. And to justify his indifference to baby's fate, Singer cites all the societies that have openly practiced infanticide, granting them a moral authority he would never grant his own society.

Since self-consciousness and sentience are for Singer the only characteristics that confer moral significance on living beings, he has to decide at what point it becomes impermissible to do away with infants. He suggests that it should be a month after birth: up till then, like customers given a cooling-off period by consumer-protection laws after a large purchase, parents should be allowed to dispose of their offspring if they are imperfect or inconvenient.

Now Singer admits that the dividing line is arbitrary: it is certainly not a scientific fact that babies achieve self-consciousness twenty-nine days after birth. The line, Singer says in a rare concession to reality, has to be drawn somewhere. But if, as he admits, the dividing line he has chosen is arbitrary, his entire pretension to a consistent and fully rational ethics falls apart. All we are left with is his personal taste for death. He will have nothing to do, however, with the idea that a baby's life is sacred, because—as we have seen—he does not value it above a snail's. Nor will he have any truck with the idea that a baby's life is worthy of respect and protection because of the baby's potentiality. What counts is what the baby is now, not what it might become, and for the moment it lacks self-consciousness. It does not follow from the fact that it will have rights that it has them now.

If Singer really believed this, could anyone sleep easy in his bed? It is true that in the morning we shall recover self-consciousness, but we are not self-conscious as we snore. If unselfconscious babies can be killed, so can unselfconscious adults, if, that is, we are to be consistent. It will surprise no one by now that Singer is a strong proponent of euthanasia. He is stung by the accusation that his ideas resemble those of the Nazis (his own parents were refugees from Austria after the Anschluss) and he draws attention to the difference between his own noble conception of doing people in and the ignoble one of the Nazis. His euthanasia will always be carried out for the benefit of the people killed, whereas the Nazis carried out euthanasia for the benefit of the race. Singer will kill people for their own good; the Nazis killed people for the good of others. Actually, the difference between Singer and the Reichsgesundheitsführer, Prof. Dr. Conti, is rather less than Singer supposes. As a matter of historical fact, the Nazi euthanasia program was first undertaken to relieve the suffering of individuals. Moreover, as Paul Weindling shows in exhaustive detail in his *Health, Race, and German Politics Between Unification and Nazism 1870–1945*, the Nazi denouement grew out of a long tradition and style of reasoning, some of which bears an uncanny resemblance to Singer's.

It is simply not true that Singer's conception of euthanasia is designed to benefit the individual rather than a collectivity. Some of the people Singer wants to kill are, by his definition, not persons at all, for example those in a persistent vegetative state: they are therefore people who, according to him, can have no interests, since only self-conscious beings have interests. They therefore

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cannot be killed for their own sake. If they are to be killed, then, it must be in someone else's interest. People are thus to be killed because their families want it or to save the hospital or the government money, or to make available an intensive-care bed for someone who stands a better chance of returning to an independent existence.

It is worth examining Professor Singer's views at length because he is so typical an example of the modern moral philosopher, whose reflections, instead of exerting an enlightening effect, exert a coarsening and brutalizing one. There are some modern moral philosophers who are less extreme than he, but also some who are more extreme. Ronald Dworkin is less extreme, for example: he believes in the sacredness of human life. But he also manages to persuade himself that the sacredness of human life is better protected by the permission of abortion and euthanasia than by their prohibition. This is because both, in his view, allow human beings the freedom to mold their own lives, the freedom that makes human life unique (as far as we know) in the universe. And because human life is sacred to him, he says that the decision to abort a fetus should never be taken for frivolous reasons. At the same time, the law should make no attempt to restrict a woman's choice in the matter. But I find it hard to see how the decision could long remain a serious one in the absence of any social condemnation for taking it or of any legal restriction. Professor Dworkin evidently hopes for people who will behave well from sheer unadulterated inner goodness, uninfluenced by any social pressure or convention. T. S. Eliot wrote of the delusory nature of the belief in a society in which arrangements are so perfect that no one will have to be good, but it is equally delusory to believe in the possibility of people who are so good that society will have to make no arrangements to encourage virtue.

Mr. Smith has also managed to find ethicists who are more extreme than Professor Singer, for example those who believe that some patients have a duty to die. No doubt Singer will manage by a leap of philosophical imagination once more to overtake them, but for the moment Professor Hardwig of East Tennessee outdoes him. There are, according to him, "many cases [when] . . . the interest of family members often ought to override those of the patient. . . . Only when the lives of family members will not be importantly affected can one rightly make exclusively or even predominantly self-regarding decisions." In other words, old people, who, by refusing to die, so selfishly hold up the legacies that their children badly need in order to finish their swimming pool or pay for their Caribbean cruise, should be helped on their way by doctors with the whole family's interest at heart.

It was all too predictable that the right to die would be succeeded by the duty to die. After all, there are no rights without duties. Mr. Smith demonstrates in his book how far philosophers have already succeeded in degrading the ethical sensibilities of doctors and indeed of society in general. In the imaginations of the bioethicists, anencephalics (that is to say, children born without brains) and those whom they revealingly persist in calling human vegetables loom disproportionately large, as if most doctors spent most of their time tending to them. They take extremely marginal cases as if they were typical, establish general principles from them, and then apply them across the board. Their arguments are driven by the conclusions they wish to reach, and their desire to reach these conclusions is itself driven by the need to have something new to say.

Hard cases make bad law; they also make bad medical ethics. The extreme difficulty of establishing a completely self-consistent system of such ethics means that to criticize any such system because it does not answer every conceivable case is therefore hardly to criticize it at all, a thought that is obvious to any mature person. The fact is that the Hippocratic tradition has served humanity well, and Mr. Smith convincingly demonstrates that its competitors are no more consistent in theory and vastly worse in practice.

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Poems
by Terri Witek & Charles Tomlinson

Master knife (one woodblock extant)

He worked mourning doves into a sliver of sky.
It's not this delight we measure him by,
but how the fierce wing of his task defied
mourning. He worked doves into a sliver of sky
and with them, light—sorrow couldn't fly
in with thick inks, deepen height into nights that nullify
work. A shiver of morning. A dove-silvered sky.
These are the delights we measure him by.

—Terri Witek

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In the hallway

What I like in a house
is the room one cannot quite see—
the one with its door half-open,
showing a mere sliver of wall,
a picture sliced in half,
a mirror reflecting a window
that is invisible from outside
where you stand in the hallway
and the owner's lady
emerges from above, revealing
how intricate is the space up there
because of a landing which casts shadow
challenged from below by the clear
cut glass of a chandelier:
under this runs the hall,
drawing one deep into its recession
with a gleam on the floor-tiles,
and in the distance a flash
off conservatory windows
angled open to admit
a summer evening, the clip
of feet advancing, and a voice:
"I do not believe that you
have been here before," she says,
and though one has
what she says is true.

—*Charles Tomlinson*

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The rain is over

The rain is over, the sky
has fallen in bright blue pieces:
you can no more pick them up
than before they fell
becoming sky-shards,
segments, a sliver
bisecting the road
with its shining chasm
which you straddle,
look into and see the way
the crowns of tree after leafless tree
have come down with it
crowding this narrow sky-pond
like underwater vegetation:
threads of what went on overhead
catch at the eye
wherever you gaze on ground,
each seam of light,
each bright stitch
a reminder of that perfection
before the heavens fell
which now—night coming on—
lie holding the stars.

—*Charles Tomlinson*

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Theater

The authentic spirit of Broadway

by Mark Steyn

A hit, a palpable hit! Not like the non-palpable hits—the *Ragtimes* and *Titanics*—whose admiring reviews delude their producers into keeping them on, and on, and on, trapped in the awful twilight existence of shows that aren't bad enough to close in the first week but aren't good enough to recoup, no matter how many months you keep them going. The Nineties were one continuous decade of them: you could get pop-opera histrionics or sub-Sondheimian tapeworms, portentous or pretentious, bombastic or boring, the bad night out that's supposed to be good for us.

And now we have the counterrevolution. *The Producers* at the St. James is the genuine article. Its redeeming virtue is that it has no redeeming virtue; in its shallowness there is a great profundity, about the deadly plonking pompousness of the modern musical. At the antiseptic revival of *42nd Street*, they're singing, from within the plastic portals of the Ford Center, of "naughty bawdy Forty-Second Street," but *The Producers* is the real thing, a world of low cunning and lofty showgirls. In embracing the fakeness of theater, it winds up more real than anything at *42nd Street*, which, from its horrible Disney-deco sets down, is an utterly fake show straining to be real. *The Producers*'s epic cheesiness has a kind of gallantry about it. And, for anyone sitting tenth row center, the most palpable sensation from all sides is joy—a quality now so rare on Broadway that at first you don't quite recognize it. It starts, during the opening, as a kind of relief—that, for once, you're not paying two-hundred bucks just for an endurance test—and then it relaxes and mellows into something deeper, the sheer pleasure that comes when you're in the presence of talents you can rely on. As you exit, you know this audience is going home happy, they'll remember the best jokes and the wacky dances, they'll tell their friends what a great time they had: this is a hot ticket that retains its heat.

It's not just that this is a "musical comedy." There are plenty around this season. But compared to the exuberance and imagination of *The Producers*, *The Full Monty* seems dull and fainthearted, and the new revival of *42nd Street* a grim waxwork. Like both those specimens, *The Producers* started as a film—a 1968 cult favorite with Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder about a Broadway showman whose schnook of an accountant gives him a great idea: get rich by producing an overcapitalized flop that closes on opening night. "You could raise a million dollars, put on a hundred-thousand-dollar failure, and keep the rest for yourself." In other words, only a schmuck would waste his time trying to produce something as elusive as a hit. The property Max Bialystock and Leo Bloom alight on for their scheme is a terrible play by an old Nazi nutcase called *Springtime For Hitler*. The failsafe flop becomes, of course, a runaway hit—though, in fact, in 1968 the film wasn't. Still,

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fans of the movie can quote its dialogue by the yard: "I was Max Bialystock, king of Broadway," the great man wails. "Look at me now. I'm wearing a cardboat belt"—which he pulls off, tears up, and hurls at his accountant. Glancing out the window, he spots a Rolls-Royce pulling up. "That's right, baby! When you've got it, flaunt it!" Later on, when *Springtime For Hitler*'s rave notices come in, he catalogues the precautions he took to ensure failure and then laments, "Where did I go right?"

Producers love *The Producers*, and I can think of at least a dozen on both sides of the Atlantic who've tried to get the rights for it. Mel Brooks, its author and director, always turned them down: "That's my insurance policy," he'd tell them. "I'm saving it for my old age." Evidently, he meant it. Brooks's next birthday will be his seventy-fifth, and lo and behold here at last is *The Producers*—*The Musical*.

Generally speaking, on Broadway the inverse of *The Producers* applies: the surefire hit becomes the stillborn flopperoo, especially if it's adapted from a film—as *Big*, *Footloose*, *Saturday Night Fever*, and a hundred others have demonstrated. But *The Producers* is a runaway hit, taking in more money than any homegrown New York play ever. Apparently inspired by their own plot, the producers of *The Producers* put up the top ticket price to a record high for an open-ended run—$100—but, with a cynical savvy that Max Bialystock himself would salute, they waited until the day after opening night so that carping about the prices wouldn't figure in the reviews. In the deserts of America's uncommercial "commercial theater," all hits are freaks, especially ones of this order. Nevertheless, it's worth asking the question Bialystock asks: Where did they go right? Why is *The Producers* a hit, and what can be learned from it?

First, as *The New York Times* noted in an editorial, *The Producers* is theater about theater, a show about showbiz—just like *A Chorus Line*, *Dreamgirls*, *Barnum*, *They're Playing Our Song*, etc., etc, ad infinitum. But a comparison with two other current productions—*Follies* and *42nd Street*—underlines just how *unlike* those other showbiz shows *The Producers* is. Unlike *Follies*, it's not about theater as metaphor. Unlike *42nd Street*, it's not about theater as fable, the American dream apotheosized. Instead, it's about Broadway hucksters with no interest in art whatsoever: funny how there's never been a musical on *that* aspect of it. Better yet, in order to rip off their investors, they produce a musical about Hitler—a ridiculous idea, to be sure, but one which recognizes a certain affinity between Nazism and musical theater. A totalitarian state and a bad musical are both crudely manipulative and robotically choreographed, reducing individual characters to one blank-faced phalanx high-stepping in unison. Thus, when we finally get to "Springtime For Hitler," the Leni Riefenstahl-meets-Flo Ziegfeld staging has a compelling logic about it.

Susan Stroman has choreographed the number as a Nazified remake of the finale to *A Chorus Line*, complete with its famous mirror (Robin Wagner, *The Producers*'s designer, pastiching his own set of a quarter-century ago), which rises to reveal the movie's signature image—the overhead shot of the kickline dancing in perfect swastika formation. Whether or not this tells us anything about Nazism, it certainly tells us something about theater: the superstagers of the Seventies—Michael Bennett (*A Chorus Line*) and Gower Champion (*42nd Street*)—were master manipulators of company and audience, but there was a heartless, dehumanizing quality to their work that grew more pronounced the more successful they became. Granted, I don't suppose Brooks thought about it that way. I once asked the great George Abbott whether, at the end of *On The Town*, the departing sailors and their dates' beautifully throwaway conversational ballad—"Oh, well, we'll catch up/ Some Other Time"—was intended to conjure wistfully the elegiac uncertainties of the war years. He replied:

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"We didn't think about that. We thought: what's funny?"

That's the Brooks approach. But, by focusing on what's funny, he winds up telling us more about the theater than we get from all the morbid self-analysis down the street at *Follies*. Among several outstanding supporting players, none has more fun than Gary Beach as the flaming director Roger de Bris—as in "debris," which is what all too often directors reduce the show to. When first we meet him, he's mooching around in a lavish gown and headdress and fretting that it makes him look like the Chrysler Building. He has a point. But at the last minute he's called upon to take over the role of Adolf, and his "common-law assistant" shoos him on stage by appropriating the climactic dialogue of *42nd Street*: "You're going out there a silly hysterical queen but you've got to come back a great big passing-for-straight Broadway star!" A tall order, especially when, in the middle of his big number, the fey Führer can't help coming downstage, curling up on the edge of the pit, and, like Judy Garland at the Palace, mouthing "I love you" at us.

His directorial philosophy is summed up in song:

> No matter what you do on the stage
> Keep it light, keep it bright
> Keep It Gay!
> Whether it's murder, mayhem, or rage
> Don't complain it's a pain
> Keep It Gay!

There's an earlier "Keep It Gay," written for the Rodgers and Hammerstein backstage musical *Me and Juliet* (1952). Hammerstein played it straight, so to speak (though the song has latterly been taken up by the New York City Gay Men's Chorus). Brooks, by contrast, is determined to live up to his title. Contemplating his approach to *Springtime For Hitler*, Roger de Bris sees:

> German soldiers dancing through France
> Played by chorus boys in very tight pants.

Anyone who's been to the theater half-a-dozen times in his life will appreciate that couplet—the dinner-theater productions of *Oklahoma!* with the swishy cowmen, or the bus-and-truck *Fiddler on the Roof* with mincing peasants. There are no gay characters in *Follies*, there's an agonized therapy-session gay in *A Chorus Line*, yet in all the hit shows about shows the core gayness of the theater has never been addressed. Brooks's singing Nazis and nympho seniors are one thing, but the fag jokes are far nearer the knuckle, and "Keep It Gay" especially so. On the one hand, Brooks accurately points out that, whatever the subject, musicals all come out the same. On the other hand, he appears to attribute this, as it were, homogeneity to the detached, self-absorbed minority which dominates the genre. There was talk of doing "Keep It Gay" on the Tony Awards telecast, but the CBS boys decided that it might be problematic "out of context."

Brooks's score as a whole has come in for somewhat sniffy reviews. It's invariably noted that he hums his tunes into a tape recorder and an amanuensis then transcribes them, the implication being that, despite the billing "Music and Lyrics by Mel Brooks," he's not a real "composer" and his arranger deserves half the credit. By that definition, Irving Berlin didn't really "compose," for he too dictated his tunes to an amanuensis. For *Titanic*, Maury Yeston wrote them all out himself, and you wish someone would break his pencil. As to the suggestion that the fellow putting the dots on the manuscript paper is the real composer, there's a simple test: tell him to go write a score without Berlin or Brooks. Any old conservatory can teach you notation and the rules of harmony, but it's harder to impart the techniques of song ideas and the music required to support them. I'm not saying that Mel Brooks is Irving Berlin, but there's no doubt that this score is his. It's also been dismissed as "unmemorable" by several critics, but that begs the question: compared to what? I'll bet not one of 'em could recall a song from *Ragtime*, though most saw the show and praised it. The same

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with *Titanic*. These scores advertised their superficial musicality through meandering, notey, cluttered faux-recitative, lacking any central lyric thrust or title resolution. Berlin's dead, so's Porter, and Kern and Styne and Loesser, and, if the only competition is from the dimestore Sondheims, Brooks can more than hold his own.

It is true that the measure of a really great composer is the trouble he takes over his comic songs, and at *The Producers* you never get that moment that you do with Kern and Wodehouse, or Porter, or Bernstein, Comden and Green, when the frothiest lyric premise is wrapped in truly glorious music. But, musical-comedy-wise, the songs from *The Producers* are better than the formula pop of *The Full Monty*. The score is always efficient, invariably pegged to a strong sustaining notion, and often genuinely inspired.

For example, early on we see Leo Bloom in his accounting firm singing a song called "I Want To Be a Producer" about wanting to be a producer. Perfectly straightforward, funny enough. But Brooks gambols merrily ahead, building and expanding, and moving into unexpected territory. Thus, in Leo's office we spy among his colleagues a black accountant. The initial assumption is that this is just some tokenistic colorblind casting gesture, but his purpose becomes clear when Leo's lament is suddenly interrupted by a deep bass rumination on the burdens of the (middle-class) Negro life:

> Oh I debits all de mornin'
> An' I credits all de eb'nin'
> Until dem ledgers be right.

"Ol' Man River" for black accountants: where did that come from? Over the years, I've had a couple of conversations with Brooks about music: he loves Kern and Porter, but, more than that, he's hung around the great American songbook long enough to pick up a lot about structure. Almost three decades ago now, he wrote the title song to *Blazing Saddles*, a lovely parody of a Hollywood western theme tune, sung by Frankie Laine, who, according to legend, was unaware it was a spoof. The following year he wrote the title number for *High Anxiety* as a kind of Jimmy Van Heusen/Sammy Cahn theme-song-for-Sinatra-to-sing-over-the-opening-credits—one of those Hollywood songs where you take the title of the film—*Three Coins in The Fountain*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, whatever—and turn it into a love ballad:

> High Anxiety
> Whenever you're near
> Ooh, 'Xiety
> It's you that I fear
> My heart's afraid to fly
> It's crashed before
> But then you take my hand
> My heart wants to soar
> What's more.

Brooks sang the number complete with octave slides and other Sinatra-isms, but the pastiche itself was very expert. He's sung enough to know the open-voweled sounds you need on big notes, and how not to clog up the line with consonants. There are fellows who've written three, four, five full-scale shows and never got the hang of these elementary rules. In *The Producers*, Brooks's at his best when he lapses into a dotty Yiddisher gibberish that's all his own. There's a song in the show-within-a-show called "Haben Sie Gehort Das Deutsche Band?," but in rehearsal it's a little too effete for

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the author of *Springtime For Hitler*, Franz Liebkind (i.e., "child lover"). So he leaps in to demonstrate how it should be done:

> Mit a bang!
> Mit a boom!
> Mit a bing-bang-bing-bang-boom!

Brooks has managed to write a "prop song" for a show about Hitler being rehearsed by a bunch of gays interrupted by a Nazi playwright anxious to demonstrate that the Führer would have done it with a more Jolsonesque bravado:

> Mit a zetz!
> Mit a zap!
> Mit a zing!

The song works on every level: it's the best Teuton-gay-Jolson number ever written, if only because it's the only one.

But, beyond his contributions as the show's composer, lyricist, co-librettist, and co-producer, Brooks is above all else an unabashedly low comic. I once suggested that his films "arguably broke new ground." "Hmm," he said, furrowing his brows thoughtfully. "I'd say that arguably they broke new wind." And, indeed, at *The Producers* we are informed that among the earlier triumphs of Max Bialystock are such searing dramas as *The Breaking Wind*. One can cite the likes of Ben Jonson ("I fart at thee"—the opening of *The Alchemist*), but the truth is, even if there were no respectable precedents, Mel Brooks would still be doing fart jokes. He really is the 2,000 Year Old Man, or at any rate a man with a 2,000 year-old jokebook—a Catskill comic who took his act to television variety shows in the Fifties, sitcoms in the Sixties, and Hollywood in the Seventies without ever varying it. Among an impressive number of limp-wristed jokes on display here, the classic "Walk this way" is lovingly exhumed and given to Roger de Bris's swishy assistant.

In other words, this isn't the tentative functional wit of contemporary musical comedy—the kind Terrence McNally wrote for *The Full Monty*. Nor is it the warm character comedy of *Sweet Charity* or *Guys and Dolls*. What we have here are gleeful, raucous jokes, tons of 'em—the sort that Herbert Fields used to connect up Rodgers and Hart songs seventy years ago, only more and better. Brooks and his co-author Thomas Meehan (librettist of *Annie*) have written a lean, exemplary book that glories in shtick, from the opening-night failure of Bialystock's *Hamlet* musical (*Funny Boy*) to the close-harmony quartet, the Heil-Los. The audience falls on it hungrily, in gratitude. So do the actors. Nathan Lane, as Bialystock, doesn't have the desperation or the nastiness of Zero Mostel, and his undoubted comic energy often seems an exercise in evasion—a dangerous strategy for a funny man. But he makes every line crackle, and his bits of business—tossing around a black cat to bring on the bad luck—are hard to resist. Yet, despite the caveats of the critics, this isn't one of those star vehicles that will be difficult to recast. Lane is good, so is Matthew Broderick as Bloom, but so is everyone else, all the way down the cast list. They're good because of the material.

Finally, for all he does do on this show, just as important is what Mel Brooks chose not to do. He could have directed the stage version, as he did the film. But many film directors have come to grief on Broadway, and he had no wish to join them. And so the staging was left to Susan Stroman, who deserves a large measure of the credit for this show's success. Miss Stroman always serves the production; she's Brooks in tights, a young alter ego with a delirious knack for bouncing the flimsiest Brooks joke into a visual delight. It starts early on with Bialystock's investors—the sexually voracious old ladies he's obliged to service in return for their checks, all made out to a play with the curious name of *Cash*. This stuff is funny enough, but it's not musical, it doesn't sing. And then Stroman moves in and concocts a tap number for the gran'mas—or, rather, not for them but for their walkers.

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The audience loves it, and Brooks and Stroman rise to the challenge it poses: this is a show that tops itself in number after number, scene after scene. If it were just funny lines, you'd soon be suffering from gag fatigue. But, thanks to Stroman, the numbers transport you—which is what musicals are supposed to be about, though we've all but forgotten. By the time we reach "Springtime For Hitler" with leggy showgirls bedecked in foaming steins and bratwursts, you know that at seventy-four Mel Brooks has found his perfect collaborator, and she in turn has pulled everything together. The jokes are funny, the songs are funny, the choreography's funny, and the cast, the sets, the costumes, the wigs, the lighting, funny, funny, funny, all in service of one beautifully melded whole. Tonal consistency is the most important quality in a musical, and this show has it: Nathan Lane's combover looks like it was made by the same guy who wrote the songs.

So where did they go right? Well, if you had to distill it to a single quality, it's this: every single one of its breast jokes and erection gags is a rebuke to the poseurs who hijacked a vital American form and, in their determination to transform it into high art, turned it into a wasteland. If the premise of *The Producers* seems absurd—a couple of guys set out to manufacture a massive flop for accounting reasons—well, it's not as absurd as the accounting practices at Livent, the theatrical conglomerate that built the Ford Center to house *Ragtime* and which is now under investigation for fraud. Livent was founded on the proposition that if you produced enough tasteful, critically admired failures—*Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, *Show Boat*, *Ragtime*—the accumulation of flops would somehow add up to the equivalent of one massive hit. That's nuttier than anything in *The Producers*. In its noisy, intoxicating, liberating vulgarity, *The Producers* is the authentic spirit of Broadway.

Editor's note: Readers are reminded that *The New Criterion* does not publish during July or August. Our next issue will appear in September. Readers are invited to visit *The New Criterion*'s web page at www.newcriterion.com, where we plan to post new material from time to time this summer.

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Art

Vermeer's world

by Karen Wilkin

Vermeer mesmerizes. His paintings cast a spell on present-day audiences, so much so that when a strike disrupted bookings for the comprehensive exhibition of his work at the National Gallery, Washington, five years ago hordes of hardy art lovers lined up before dawn in bitter February weather for a chance to enter. This spring they have been crowding around Vermeer's paintings in preference to almost anything else in the Metropolitan Museum's ambitious survey of the context that formed him and in which he worked, "Vermeer and the Delft School."[1] "It's easy to tell where the Vermeers are in any of the galleries," a young artist reported to me. "You just go to where there are twenty people in front of a painting."

That's no casual choice. There have been complaints that the exhibition is not exclusively devoted to Vermeer, mostly from those immune to the charms of the luxury items—tapestries, elaborate gold and silver objects, portraits of the ruling classes, and the occasional elaborately painted tile—included to establish that the city, despite its size, was wealthy and sophisticated in the seventeenth century. (But how could anyone resist an ensemble of elaborate tapestry horse-trappings, neatly tied on the shoulder, which puts anything at Hermès to shame?) Others have expressed their limited tolerance for the large numbers of church interiors (many depicting the Delft Nieuwe Kirk's glory, the tomb of William the Silent, the assassinated martyr of Dutch resistance to Spanish rule) despite the fine improvisations on pale geometric forms in the best of them and the amusing anecdotal inclusions in almost all. (Seventeenth-century dogs had the run of Dutch churches and according to the paintings, at least, abused the privilege.) There is a perhaps excessive number of images of the city, in prints, drawings, and paintings, though admittedly all good examples and interesting enough in isolation. At least one work, Daniel Vosmaer's limpid view, *The Harbor of Delft* (c. 1658–60, Museo de Arte de Ponce, Ponce, Puerto Rico), requires no justification beyond its merits as a painting, and cumulatively the selection sets the stage by conjuring up the streets and the exteriors of those white church interiors and the houses in which Vermeer's pensive women tune their lutes, read their letters, and admire their necklaces. Yet it is hard to avoid thinking that the painter's regrettably absent iconic view of his home town would have made the point more economically and more satisfyingly.

1 "Vermeer and the Delft School" was on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from March 8 to May 27, 2001. It will also be seen at The National Gallery, London, from June 20 to September 16. A catalog of the exhibition, edited by Walter Liedtke, has been published by the museum in association with Yale University Press (640 pages, $75).

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But these are quibbles. "Vermeer and the School of Delft" brings together a splendid selection of works that allows us to see this most enigmatic of painters not as a unique figure, but as a member of a community of artists in the prosperous little city where he spent his working life. The assembly of Vermeers is impressive—almost half of his surviving thirty-odd works, some of them rarely seen away from the museums that house them, a few not included in the Washington show. But many of Vermeer's most celebrated colleagues are represented no less impressively. The exhibition includes, for example, lively drawings by Paulus Potter—best known for his paintings of large, contemplative cows—done during his short sojourn in Delft, an ample group of Pieter De Hooch's best domestic scenes and streetscapes, and a truly astonishing number of the few extant works of Carel Fabritius, the superbly gifted pupil of Rembrandt—apparently a crucial influence on the young Vermeer—who died young and tragically. For Vermeer to dominate the field in such company is a clear indicator of the hold he exerts on the viewer's imagination.

Why is this? Partly because his best pictures are, quite simply, so wonderful and partly, I suspect, because they are so convincing and seemingly so transparent. Each of his intimate, meticulously crafted images appears to be a window into a miniature world at once wholly artificial and wholly real. Vermeer's preternaturally ordered, silent interiors are like subliminal demonstrations of an ideal, otherworldly geometry; ordinary furnishings have magically assumed a perfectly harmonious relationship to their setting, to everything else in the picture and to the shape and proportions of the canvas itself. (That perfect harmony makes it especially startling to learn that Vermeer and his wife raised eleven children in the house in which he lived and painted; perhaps that's why, unlike most of his colleagues, he produced so few pictures—scholars estimate that the surviving works represent about three-quarters of his total oeuvre—although the fact that his wife was a wealthy woman may have also been a factor, since it lessened his need to make work in order to earn his living.)

Perhaps it is the underlying tension between artifice and actuality (despite the effect of harmoniousness) that makes Vermeer's best pictures so compelling. They are clearly made of blocky strokes of pigment, and yet they vividly evoke our visual and tactile experience of the everyday world: its textures, the character of its inanimate objects, and above all the particulars of its light and its spaces. Like Velázquez a generation earlier, Vermeer never gets a tone wrong; the best of his mysterious pictures conjure up specific times of day, temperatures, and seasons, from the chilly gloom of a brief, Northern winter afternoon to the pale radiance of a spring morning. He allows us to become the unseen observers of a continuous, uneventful present, turns us into witnesses to the quiet domestic rituals enacted within spaces we begin to find familiar: a room lit by tall windows on our left, with geometric tile floors and pale plaster walls hung with maps and paintings. The furnishings vary slightly, from picture to picture, as do certain details—the floor patterns, window mullions, and the tiles that sometimes appear at the base of the wall—but we begin to recognize a particular tapestry curtain or a set of chairs with lion finials. It all seems utterly peaceful and hermetic. Time moves slowly, as though its inexorable progression were somehow held in check by the firm verticals and horizontals of Vermeer's compositions. Yet this disciplined pictorial framework is softened, blurred (metaphorically, at times literally) by nearly palpable sheets of light. Nothing of great significance seems to be happening. Whatever drama there is hinges on the contents of a letter or a reaction to a proffered glass of wine.

Vermeer's world appears to be entirely domestic, but that impression quickly evaporates. We don't need to know very much about the conventions of seventeenth-century painting to realize that there is often

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more implied. If we look attentively at the details of the seemingly anecdotal furnishings of the room, a picture of a woman weighing gold—a miracle of cool gray-blue planes and masses—starts to take on a moral message about vanity, for example. At the same time, it all seems so specific, so faithful to perception, that we become certain that Vermeer is permitting us a glimpse into his reality, that he is presenting us with a faithful record of something that he has scrutinized. Yet the more intently we look, the more unreal it all becomes. Not only do we realize that Vermeer's pictorial structures are so idealized as to verge on abstraction (no, he is not a modernist ahead of his time), but we also become aware of strange discrepancies of scale and inexplicably abrupt shifts in spatial relationships that hint at reliance not on acute observation, but on some intermediary optical device. Paint declares itself almost independently of what it alludes to, in little flickers and patches that are intensely evocative of the play of light on particular surfaces without in any way describing them literally. (That's part of why the Impressionists found Vermeer so exciting when he was rediscovered in the mid-nineteenth century by the French critic Thoré-Bürger).

The exhibition at the Met makes clear that Vermeer was very much a man of his time. Each of his pictures in the show is presented among related works by his peers. The first Vermeer we encounter, an early effort completed about the time the twenty-one-year-old artist joined the painter's guild in Delft, is the radiant *Diana and Her Companions* (c. 1653–54, Mauritshuis, The Hague), hung in the company of works by earlier Delft painters documenting the entire range of subject matter popular at the time: portraits (including a stiff group portrait of an anatomical demonstration that reminds us forcibly of Rembrandt's genius in transforming the genre), religious scenes, church interiors, views of the city and its environs, and so on. Diana was a common motif of the period, it seems, but the luminosity of Vermeer's painting and its subtle modelling of form seem very much his own. So does the ampleness and four-square architectonic massing of the large-scale figures, the heft of their bodies beneath the silky fabrics. There are some mild infelicities of drawing and proportion, but they seem inconsequential. What transforms the picture—seeming to prefigure Vermeer's mature work—is a sense of a private moment observed, of an ordinary event—even among immortals—glimpsed unawares. The absorbed young women in the group turn away from us. One kneels to sponge the feet of the goddess, another studies the sole of her own foot; all seem lost in thought, silent. With the luxury of knowing what was to come, we can see this early mythological scene as prefiguring the motifs with which Vermeer is most closely associated, the domestic interiors populated by introspective women.

The overt Italianate qualities of *Diana and Her Companions* raise interesting questions about what Vermeer's links with Italian painting might have been throughout his brief career (he died suddenly at the end of 1675, aged forty-three). There's no evidence that he ever went to Italy, but he seems to have been recognized as specially knowledgable about the subject; almost twenty years after the Diana was painted, as an established (if atypically non-prolific) member of the art community, Vermeer was one of two Delft painters called to The Hague as experts to examine twelve pictures presumed to be Italian masterpieces. (They testified that the works were "great pieces of rubbish and bad paintings," not worth a fraction of their asking price.) Scholars debate whether the artist's father, a tavern keeper cum art dealer, may have dealt in Italian art or whether Vermeer himself did, since he seems to have supplemented his activities as a painter by buying and selling pictures. In the Met's installation another link is suggested by the proximity of two paintings by Leonaert Bramer, a popular artist a generation older than Vermeer but apparently connected to him and his family; Bramer spent many years in Rome before

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returning to his native Delft, undoubtedly full of information about the latest developments in the South.

As we move through the show, we are simultaneously dazzled by individual works and encouraged to make connections between them. Vermeer's transition from the large-scale history paintings of his youth to the smaller, more intimate subjects for which he is best-known is announced by a grouping that begins with the glowing *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (c. 1655, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh). This trio of generous figures, all intent upon one another even though each occupies a different spatial zone in the picture, is loosely linked by a swirl of hands, each positioned differently in space. Like the *Diana*, the painting is notably Italianate, yet the bowed, broadly painted figure of Martha, holding a basket of bread and leaning forward across a table draped with a white cloth over a Turkish carpet, seems to point to what Vermeer's future will be. If we break free of the Edinburgh picture and turn to the left, we see *The Procuress*, Vermeer's only dated picture—1656—a thrilling inclusion for those of us who have never made it to the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden. At first glance, it seems a typical enough "merry company" of the period, with its leering musician and hooded old woman, and its compliant young woman who allows herself to be fondled, for a price, by an assertive type in a red jacket and a rakishly-angled plumed hat. Yet *The Procuress* is an odd, inconsistent picture, both because of its compressed spatial qualities and its strange overtones of the Caravaggio-influenced "low life" paintings of the Utrecht School. It's so inconsistent, in fact, that its attribution has been debated and so reminiscent of Utrecht School pictures that it has prompted suggestions that Vermeer may have studied there. Set near the exhibition's other (generally smaller scale) "merry company" pictures, *The Procuress* settles down a little. It still looks young, tentative, and a little unformed—perhaps Vermeer had more solid prototypes to rely on for his early religious and mythological pictures—but it makes sense as a step towards the picture hung beside it: the Met's slightly later interior with a young woman dozing over a wine glass, *A Maid Asleep* (c. 1656–57). This picture is most seductive for its narrow view into an adjoining room, but the suggestion that the maid is drunk connects this domestic vignette with the tradition of the "merry company," while on a more formal level, the stiff, rucked-up carpet on the table of *A Maid Asleep* seems like a more rational version of the related, but differently patterned rug apparently draped over a balcony in *The Procuress*. Where the Met's picture differs most strikingly from Vermeer's earlier works, with their large-scale figures in ambiguous spaces, is in the way the specifics of the setting begin to play a role equal or even more important to that of the figures; that open door, that glimpse into the next room powerfully stir our associations with time and place.

But good as these pictures are, and logical and instructive as this grouping of early Vermeers is, it's hard to understand why visitors are concentrating on these works—especially on *A Maid Asleep*—at the expense of their near neighbors. It's true that pairing this familiar image with *The Procuress* makes us see both works freshly, but that's not the only exciting comparison afforded by the wall of this gallery. To the left of *The Procuress* are two (presumed) self-portraits by the elusive Carel Fabritius, one a roughly stroked, strikingly direct image from the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, thought to have been painted about 1648–50, just before the young painter settled in Delft and not long after he left the studio of Rembrandt—whose influence is palpable in this arresting picture. The second self-portrait, from the National Gallery, London, is dated 1654, the year of Fabritius's death, aged thirty-two, in the horrendous powder-magazine explosion that flattened a considerable part of Delft. Rembrandt's example was obviously invaluable,

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but being on his own was obviously good for Fabritius. The later self-portrait is no less direct than the first, but the paint handling is notable broader and smoother, the tawny palette more light-struck.

The show includes two more extraordinary paintings by Fabritius from his final year, one the well-known, enchanting little goldfinch chained to its perch, the bird rendered with a dozen assured strokes of reddish brown, beige, black, and dull gold, against an expanse of creamy wall. Miraculously, the picture is installed where it can be seen close up, in good light, which is, alas, not true of how it is usually displayed at the Mauritshuis. The other—perhaps the high point of the exhibition—is the indecipherable masterpiece, *The Sentry* (Staatliches Museum, Schwerin), on one of its rare trips away from Northern Germany. (Napoleon may have taken it to the Louvre in the early nineteenth century, but it's not certain.) Cumulatively, this remarkable ensemble of potent works, a good portion of the tantalizingly small legacy of an amazingly gifted artist, reinforce the exhibition's thesis that Fabritius, ten years older than Vermeer and with the authority of having studied with a celebrated master in Amsterdam, had a powerful influence on the younger painter. (He seems to have had a similar effect on Vermeer's contemporary, De Hooch.) There's evidence that Vermeer owned works by Fabritius. At the Met, *The Sentry* makes a forceful case for a connection between the two not only because of its combination of broad and delicate paint-handling, but also because of its virtuoso deployment of the planes of walls, both near and far, and of architectural volumes, from a shadowy stairway to an overhanging arch. Fabritius organized these complex spaces almost symmetrically, anchoring them with a dominant central column and forcing them into spatial coherence with an extraordinarily rich, delicate harmony of grays, creams, ochres, and luminous pale apricot. The setting and space of Fabritius's composition are crucial to the formal and expressive effect of the picture, just as they will be in Vermeer's mature works, while the sprawled figure (asleep? working on his gun?), like the watchful dog, turns away from our gaze, just as Vermeer's figures do; yet the conversation among the rhythmic drawing of the portcullis, the vines and their geometric framework, and the edge of the steps seems Fabritius's own.

Fabritius's paintings suggest, like Masaccio's, that had he lived longer the course of painting in his time might have been noticeably different. They suggest, as well, that his example may have helped the younger Vermeer to form his distinctive manner. At the same time, however, the exhibition's large group of pictures by Pieter De Hooch, who was just about the same age as his fellow Delft painter, reminds us how much Vermeer's work also owed to his close contemporaries and how much it reflected the desiderata of his time; his "distinctive manner" had more to do with nuance than with radical reinvention. As the selection at the Met makes plain, De Hooch, a native of Rotterdam who worked in Delft from about 1654 to 1660, painted small-scale domestic interiors and "merry companies," not dissimilar to Vermeer's. There's even evidence that Vermeer followed De Hooch's lead in some compositions, all of which helps to explain why the Delft master's paintings were attributed to those of his colleagues, including De Hooch, whose work remained in favor, during the eclipse of Vermeer's reputation in the eighteenth century, but that's another matter.

The selection of De Hoochs at the Met makes plain, too, that he was capable of wonderful effects of perspective and light, and sometimes of color: rooms opening into rooms, doors seen edge-on, a view from a courtyard through a passageway and across a canal, a patch of sunshine on a rosy tile floor. But even at their most structurally inventive, De Hooch's pictures always seem more anecdotal, less rigorous than Vermeer's. The exhibition neatly underscores the similarities and differences between the two painters by grouping a pair of De

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Hooch's most delightful views of figures in the courtyard of a Delft house (both 1658, one from the National Gallery, London, the other from a private collection) with Vermeer's beloved and enchanting *Little Street* (c. 1658–60, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). The De Hoochs engagingly contrast a contained, shallow space and a long view through a passage, while giving an apparently faithful record of what you might be likely to find—or do—in the carefully paved and tended precincts behind the narrow, severe façades of Delft houses. Vermeer, typically, suppresses the anecdotal to concentrate on essential relationships of geometric shapes pulled parallel to the surface of the canvas. *The Little Street* is brilliantly organized in two dimensions, but everything is also located within a larger scheme of things by the welcoming plane of the street, which leads us from our own space outside the canvas to the wall of buildings just within; the women absorbed in their tasks offer delicate punctuation to a variety of spaces, while a large expanse of sky offers another coordinate. Still, the overall effect remains of extreme frontality, just as, despite the wealth of convincing detail (deceptive, since the building is architecturally illogical), despite the powerful illusionism of textures and the uncanny effect of time's being stopped, the picture seems almost abstract, as though the only possible next step was Mondrian.

And there are many more pleasures to be had in "Vermeer and the Delft School." There's *The Glass of Wine* (c. 1658–59, Gemaldegalerie, Berlin), recently cleaned and glorious in color, with the tender rose pink of the girl's dress competing for attention with the vivid characterization conveyed by the way she raises her glass to drain it. There's the little head of a girl with a fantastic red hat from the National Gallery, Washington, with its startling flicks of paint and broad planes. In this context, we look with fresh eyes at the Met's own treasured Vermeers, pictures we've all grown up with, such as the *Young Woman with a Pitcher of Milk* (c. 1662), a model of how cool, diffuse sunlight picks out the glitter of well-tended brass, the reds of a Turkish carpet, the crisp folds of white linen, the yellow of a striped jacket, or the ultramarine of a skirt. The context also clarifies our view of the Met's cooler, more subdued *Woman with a Lute* (c. 1662–63), another familiar painting of a wholly engrossed woman in a setting whose geometry seems at once inevitable and surprising.

These paintings look better than ever in the company of the rather rigidly constructed pair of insipid, self-conscious women playing virginals, from the National Gallery, London, painted about a decade after the Met's pictures. New Yorkers shouldn't gloat, however; the show's brilliant finale is the complex masterwork, *The Art of Painting* (c. 1666–68, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), and it makes the Met's *Allegory of Faith* (c. 1670–72), a disconcerting painting at best, appear even more theatrical and problematic than usual. *The Art of Painting* is one of Vermeer's most intellectually and formally ambitious works (and one of his most achieved), with its elegantly but anachronistically dressed painter seated at his easel, scrutinizing a model accoutered to symbolize fame, its wash of pale sunlight, and its delicate orchestration of warm grays and creams brought to life by dull oranges and intense blues. Both allegories are triumphs of high illusionism, almost certainly achieved with the aid of a camera obscura, but in *The Art of Painting*, these technical feats are subsumed by assured paint-handling, inventive color, and evocative light. In the rather inert *Allegory of Faith*, verisimilitude is forced into a shotgun marriage with elaborately staged symbols, making us grateful that, at least according to the evidence of the majority of the surviving works, Vermeer concentrated on genre rather than history painting.

It's all fascinating and, often, illuminating. Seeing Vermeer in context helps to locate him more firmly within the history of art, but he remains enigmatic, plainly of his

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time yet fundamentally different from his peers. That we must form our idea of this difficult, appealing painter almost entirely from his art is part of the fascination. Nothing at all is known about his training. He left no record of his method nor did any of his contemporaries comment on it. The fragments that have been pieced together about his life and practice rely a great deal upon informed conjecture, cautious assumption, circumstantial evidence, and intelligent speculation. Even the name "Johannes Vermeer" poses problems. A definitive overview of the field is provided by the exhaustively researched, copiously illustrated catalogue that accompanies "Vermeer and the Delft School." The question the catalogue, like the exhibition, addresses is "would Vermeer have become the same painter had he lived in Amsterdam, Haarlem, or Leiden?" The conclusion that he would not is reached by a series of essays that provides a vivid picture of the artistic traditions of Delft, including detailed discussions of the work of the city's leading artists—Fabritius, Bramer, De Hooch, and Vermeer. There's also an "Imaginary Walk Through Seventeenth-Century Delft" and a section devoted to plans of the city from the period with "locations of major monuments and addresses of artists and patrons."

A trio of more specialized recent publications offers a closer look at Vermeer himself. Anthony Bailey's *Vermeer: A View of Delft*[2] is an eminently readable, literate compendium of the recent research into the history of his elusive subject. Bailey isn't quite as good as Simon Schama at bringing the smells, and sights, and textures of the past to life—to his credit, he is far more concise—and he sometimes is overly literal in his approach to paintings, but the book is an informative gathering of what is currently known about Vermeer, thoughtfully presented.

More arcane aspects of Vermeer's practice are dissected in Philip Steadman's slightly obsessive treatise, *Vermeer's Camera: Uncovering the Truth Behind the Masterpieces*,[3] which must be the most thorough discussion ever of the history of the camera obscura and of Vermeer's use of the device as an aid to representation. Absent any documentation from the artist, Steadman bases his theories on visible evidence within the paintings—it's complicated, and the book is full of diagrams—corroborating his conclusions by building scale- and full-sized models of the set-ups from which Vermeer is presumed to have worked. It's entertaining and persuasive, although it doesn't explain why Vermeer's pictures, whatever their technology, are so much more resonant and just plain better than those of his colleagues, who presumably had access to whatever tools well-equipped artists of the period had at their disposal.

Vermeer's Wager: Speculations on Art History, Theory, and Art Museums[4] by the Vermeer scholar Ivan Gaskell, curator at the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard, is described as standing "at the intersection of art history and criticism, philosophy and museology." Gaskell takes as his starting point one of those bland, late paintings of musicmaking women from the National Gallery, London, and traces, among other things, the history of the perception of its merits and value, and its relationship to other works of its period, examining, along the way, the various factors, techniques, and theories that have influenced such notions. The book is full of provocative ideas, but Gaskell, alas, is a master of impenetrable academic prose; no idea is too simple or straightforward to escape convolution or ponderous phrasing. Vermeer may have loaded his pictures with subtle meanings that modern-day viewers must work hard to discover, but he also valued clarity and lucidity. If only Gaskell did.

2 *Vermeer: A View of Delft*, by Anthony Bailey; Henry Holt & Co., 256 pages, $27.50.

3 *Vermeer's Camera: Uncovering the Truth Behind the Masterpieces*, by Philip Steadman; Oxford University Press, 256 pages, $25.

4 *Vermeer's Wager: Speculations on Art History, Theory, and Art Museums*, by Ivan Gaskell; Reaktion Books, 280 pages, $27.

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Exhibition notes

"Joel Shapiro on the Roof" at
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York. May 1–October 31, 2001

"Joel Shapiro:
Recent Sculpture and Drawings"
at PaceWildenstein, New York.
April 27–May 26, 2001

Much of the art of the twentieth century has attempted to reconcile the figurative and the abstract; Joel Shapiro is one of the few to do so in three dimensions. Atop the Metropolitan Museum, five of his spindly objects are on view throughout the summer, set against the verdant backdrop of Central Park and, beyond, the notched curtain of the city itself. This show marks the first time his sculpture has been situated high above the street, and it's appropriate because Shapiro sees his work not "as an extension of architecture but in healthy opposition." As he said in a recent interview, "I'm not interested in the floor, wall, or tabletop as a pattern, a template, as a basis of form . . . the corollary of painting being limited by format is sculpture's acquiescence to any architecture." What he is interested in is the human figure.

One of the first works one sees upon stepping out onto the Met roof, *Untitled* (2000–01), is a life-sized figure, in cast aluminum painted blue, of a person walking, its long rectangular blocks serving as the torso and limbs. Balanced precariously on the right leg, with the left in the air high-stepping or marching, arms flung vigorously before and behind, the walker, with its teetering, motile energy, is a perfect example of Shapiro's sculptural work. The tallest work at the Met is twenty-four feet high—also cast in aluminum and painted, though red—but still relies on Shapiro's typical cantilevering to anchor its five limb-and-torso-like blocks: it looks like a gymnast poised on one arm, his legs and the other arm held above. The other three works in the show are cast in bronze, two of which have a similarly vertical organization, while the fifth, *Untitled* (1991), stretches out more horizontally.

Whether twenty-four feet or only inches high, recognizably figural or not, all of Shapiro's sculptures employ parts that are human in scale. He works by making small wooden models joined together with glue and metal pins, then, after arriving at the right form, casting a full-scale work. At PaceWildenstein's thorough and sightly exhibition, many small-sized works could be seen alongside the larger sculptures. Though cast in bronze, the small works retain the wood grain of the original models, admitting a glimpse of their genesis in the studio.

Angular and spare, Shapiro's sculpture has clear affinities with Constructivism, despite the fact that he tends to use the more traditional medium of bronze. The highly designed graphic and abstract qualities one associates with Constructivism are evident, too, in the seven remarkable drawings on view at PaceWildenstein. Employing overlapping rectangular and square blocks of pastel and charcoal, the drawings seem almost a throwback to early modernist abstraction. Splashes, smudges, and stray marks enliven the white areas of paper, saving the hard-edged geometries of the rectangular blocks from overly graphic inertness. On paper, Shapiro can indulge his surprising facility with color, using the overlapping red, blue, black, brown, and pink shapes to suggest the shallow depths beneath the picture's literal plane as a compositional principle instead of the more human forms that organize the sculptures.

The sculptures at PaceWildenstein, though endlessly inventive and playful, were nevertheless all cast in bronze. Due to their colors, the drawings recalled the two painted aluminum sculptures on the Met roof. Shapiro has only recently begun painting his sculptural work. Adding color to his three-dimensional work certainly opens fecund new avenues for his sculptural enterprises, and one hopes he will continue in this direction. These two shows prove

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Shapiro a master of visual space in all its dimensions, so much so that the underlying struggle between figuration and abstraction recedes to the background, allowing us to bask in the pure pleasure of beholding his creations.

"Sidney Tillim: Recent Paintings"
at Trans Hudson Gallery, New York.
April 10–May 12, 2001

Taken together, the eight paintings in Sidney Tillim's recent show comprise a sly, highly intellectualized challenge to our understanding of history and history painting. How successfully any one of the works might stand on its own is less clear. These are somewhat crudely executed, faintly Hopperesque exercises in a representational vein. They are primarily forceful as a group commentary on how we experience history in our daily lives. Some of them, such as *David Cone's No-Hitter* (1999–2000) and *Modern Crime, or The Death of Irene Silverman* (2001), take their subjects directly from contemporary news stories. The others reimagine scenes from films: *Chariots of Fire, American Beauty,* and *Johnny Guitar,* among them.

A critic as well as an artist, Tillim at seventy-six seems to be playing a postmodern game, culling images (postmodern theorists would use the flat-footed term "appropriation" here) from popular culture and serving them up again in another medium—oil or acrylic paint—but such a characterization hardly gets at the interest of Tillim's gambit. The Cone and Silverman paintings—depicting, respectively, a perfectly pitched baseball game of July 18, 1999, and the swindle and murder of Irene Silverman by a mother-and-son team—make the point that the moments from history that have the most significance for us today are distinctly less elevated and less edifying than those depicted by the history painters of the past. His Sunday painter's treatment of them, which, strangely enough is in no way displeasing despite its offhand manner, hammers the point home: for us, history has a diminished presence.

The other six canvases ask us to accept the fact that popular culture, film in this case, has the same standing *as* history for contemporary viewers and that we are likely to recall scenes from films as history. In fact, these images are given the status of history precisely because they are recalled or reimagined; the artist did not copy film stills. I've not seen all the films to which Tillim alludes, but I've seen enough of them to know that he has not recreated the scenes verbatim.

American Beauty (2000): a young blond woman in a skirt sits, with her shirt open and her breasts visible, on a couch covered with a yellow, floral patterned fabric in a wood-paneled room, while, next to her, a young dark-haired man walks past, his back to us. The pair do not look much like the actors in the film, and the scene, though it has elements that are similar to those in *American Beauty*—a suburban setting, a dark-haired young man and blond-haired young woman—did not take place in the film. An outtake perhaps, but more likely an image from the film distorted by memory, as moments of recent history tend to be distorted.

In part, what makes the show so engaging is the paradox offered by its means and thrust: the unrefined technique Tillim employs in painting these works belies the extremely sophisticated arguments about history and art that the show makes. Unfortunately, any one of these paintings (with the possible exception of *Modern Crime*, the centerpiece) would, on its own, be cut off from the cumulative argument of the whole, leaving it, like history in this show, considerably reduced in stature.

—Daniel Kunitz

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Music

New York chronicle: of Battle, bondage & more

by Jay Nordlinger

Kathleen Battle was once a bright, wondrous young singer, albeit with a tic or two; sometime in mid-career, however, she took a turn for the worse. Her travails both personal and professional are fairly well known. Two seasons ago, she gave a particularly disastrous recital at Carnegie Hall, in which her technique, and her poise generally, seemed to betray her. It was an extremely hard evening to sit through. Even a Battle-hater—of whom there are more than a few—had to sympathize with her.

The soprano was back in Carnegie Hall on April 19, much improved from that earlier outing. Indeed, we could see why the world had been enthusiastic about her in the first place. With her regular accompanist Martin Katz at the piano, she started out with a group of Schubert Italian songs, only rarely sung. Her singing was clear, refined, and free. Her intonation was infinitely better than before, and it seemed that much of her old confidence had returned. We were reminded of that light, lovely voice, with those silvery tones on top. If this group of songs had a problem, it was that Battle sang them all sweetly; a little more character in the voice, and in the presentation, would have been desirable. This is the sort of charge that has long dogged Kiri Te Kanawa, whom Battle resembles in certain ways.

In Schubert's very long (German) song *Viola*, the singer showed charm and delicacy, but in the section that ought to be gloomy and sharper-edged she was rather bland, bloodless. She seemed to be up to her trick of placing every note prettily. Still, her *Hirt auf dem Felsen*—Schubert's scena-like song for soprano, piano, and clarinet—was remarkably smooth and appealing, with Battle in admirable control of herself. The extremely labored breathing and exaggerated mannerisms of the past were banished. The entire piece was beautifully shaped. Battle's clarinetist, Ricardo Morales, principal on that instrument for the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, acquitted himself adequately.

Beginning the second half of the recital were the two major arias from Massenet's *Manon*, which Battle has for years dearly loved to sing. She did the arias with assurance and panache, bringing true character to Manon. Battle is especially good at conveying flirtation, pride, poutiness, and hauteur (no comments from the peanut gallery). Her uppermost notes aren't quite as silvery and beautiful as in the past, nor are they held as long, but they still score.

After the Massenet came more French music, this time Ravel's *Shéhérazade*, a difficult work, solidly performed. Then four spirituals on the printed program, followed by many, many encores—around eight—most of them spirituals, and all of them convincingly and touchingly sung. I have, to say the least, taken my shots at Battle over the years—haven't we all, in this line of work?—but one must acknowledge that she is among the most notable voices of our

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time. It was good to see that her difficulties have not finished her off. And, in the tradition of devoting the final sentence to a remark concerning the accompanist, I should say: Martin Katz was even more superb—more alert, more polished—than usual.

In April, the Metropolitan Opera offered its *Samson et Dalila*, featuring Plácido Domingo and Olga Borodina, the most outstanding singers in these roles today. With its recent *Nabucco* (Italian for Nebuchadnezzar), the Met has presented quite a bit of Israelite bondage this season. Like that Verdi opera, Saint-Saëns's *Samson* is a heavily choral work, and, as expected, the company's chorus responded admirably. This opera is a fairly easy one to make seem ridiculous, but here was a production that had dignity, drama, and guts.

Borodina, at thirty-seven in her prime, is thrilling as Dalila, as in so much else. But we ought to take a moment to consider her older colleague, Domingo, who is sixty this year. For decades, he has been a puzzling singer, one of the most uneven in the business. Some nights, he sings magnificently, showing that he belongs in the pantheon of tenors, with Caruso and the rest. Other nights, he is so dismaying—both technically and musically—that one might say, "Tell me again: How did he get famous, and why are all these people here?" In this, he resembles Jessye Norman as no one else.

On the night I attended, Domingo's singing of Samson's music was hardly less than definitive: definitive of French singing both creamy and virile. In every act, he was resplendent and gleaming, demonstrating a legato that is very rarely heard. He sang practically without effort; even when at high volume, pouring out passion, he did not push. Everything that he knows—about breathing, about placement, about phrasing, about music—came together. It was hard to say when he had ever sounded better; no concession whatever needed to be made to age. None. At the opera's high point—"Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix," mainly an aria for Dalila but partially a duet—Borodina and Domingo produced some of the most beautifully romantic singing one could ever hope to hear. To have those two voices in the air, entwined, was sensational. This was one of those nights on which the opera house tingles, or pulses.

A couple of other elements deserve notice. As the Old Hebrew, Vaclovas Daunoras, a Lithuanian, contributed his strikingly rich, wet bass voice. And the British conductor Mark Elder handled his responsibilities well. There were some coordination problems in the Bacchanale, but it was nevertheless erotic, primal, and (rightly) shocking.

New York has been abounding in Czech music lately—there seems to be a Czech festival on every block—and the Met did its part with *The Makropulos Case*, the hard-hitting, cackling opera by Leos Janáček. This is a peculiar work, with a varied and propulsive score. In the pit for these performances was Sir Charles Mackerras, long a champion of Janáček, and possibly his finest interpreter. In appearance, this was another of the Met's trench-coated productions, spooky and modern, like Busoni's *Doktor Faust* earlier in the season.

The star of *The Makropulos Case* is the opera star of the story, Emilia Marty, here portrayed by Catherine Malfitano. Thus does prima donna—in every sense—meet prima donna. Malfitano was, indeed, marvelously apt. She made her Met debut in 1979, but she seems little the worse for wear. There is occasionally a wobble in her voice, but that voice retains its power, particularly its power to cut: evidently, it can knife through anything, as this character is required to do. Physically speaking, Malfitano is a bombshell (though not a blonde one), and she moves with great freedom, like a young, daring girl. Throughout this strenuous evening, she used her body brilliantly. Her death—talk about a spooky affair—was magnificent.

In the role of Gregor, the American tenor Robert Brubaker shouted somewhat, as he had done in *Doktor Faust*, but to less harm-

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ful effect this time. He sang with the abandon and, ultimately, derangement that the part demands. Another American tenor, Matthew Polenzani, was sweet-voiced as Janek. The German bass Peter Mikulás, singing Kolenaty, was sturdy and pleasantly gruff, achieving a nice characterization. And making a special impression was the American bass-baritone Tom Fox, as Prus. He was regal, commanding, imposing: all suave menace.

The entire production had an exceptional drive and vitality. Sir Charles obviously has this music under his skin. Often, he is a decorous, retiring conductor, but he presided over an affair of not only passion but a fantastic musical wildness.

The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra did well for itself two years ago when it hired Yuri Temirkanov, a Russian maestro of distinction. He conducts not only the Baltimore now, but also the St. Petersburg Philharmonic. It was there, many years ago, that he served as an assistant to Evgeny Mravinsky, one of the ablest conductors of the century, though he never achieved the renown in the West that he deserved. Temirkanov is a tall man with very long arms who employs a most unusual baton technique. Or rather, it would be a baton technique if he used a baton. He is especially admired for his way with Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony, which he has recorded twice, the first time with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, of which he is currently conductor laureate.

His program with the Baltimore, at Carnegie Hall on April 26, began with Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kijé* Suite, one of that composer's more popular scores. The orchestra sounded rough-hewn and bold, not slick or polished. It sounded soulful and brash. Indeed, it sounded Russian. The Prokofiev was not exactly a model of precision, but it had the right spirit about it, and it was refreshing to hear this familiar (though not often programmed) music, which on so many LP's of days gone by was paired with Kodály's equally enjoyed *Hary Janos* Suite.

The soloist that evening was Lang Lang, an eighteen-year-old Chinese pianist making his Carnegie Hall debut. He is a student at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he studies with Gary Graffman, the American pianist of prodigious technique. Lang's concerto was the Grieg, traditionally scorned by the sophisticati (or, more accurately, the would-be sophisticati), but beloved, or at least respected, by more than a few serious musicians, including Sviatoslav Richter and Arthur Rubinstein, the second of whom performed and recorded the work repeatedly and defiantly.

Lang had a successful debut, unquestionably. He has many assets, the most notable being a superb rhythmic sense, which cannot be taught, but must reside in the player. His entrance—just to begin at the beginning—was perfectly timed, and very often this moment is botched. Lang's playing was often beautiful and musical. But he revealed some bad habits, too, including releasing notes early and letting them sort of hang on by means of the sustaining pedal. He frequently produced pinging noises rather than properly pianistic ones. He also skimmed the surface of the keyboard, and failed to give much of a singing line. In several passages, he rushed (despite what I have described as an uncanny rhythmic sense). There was a deficiency of color in his playing, too, and the Adagio, in particular, suffered from a lack of lyricism.

But young Mr. Lang has a clear musical spark, and lots and lots of fingers. The Grieg is a romantic pianistic romp, and Lang played it that way, unabashedly. After the final chords, he jumped up and hugged Temirkanov giddily, unable to contain himself. He then played an encore: a Scriabin piece much loved, and used, by Horowitz. Lang might have been wiser to stop with the Grieg, however, as his playing of the Scriabin was frightfully vulgar: way too fast and totally misjudged. Oddly enough, he was banging away—visibly pounding at the keyboard—but not getting much sound. This is strictly a matter of technique, a

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problem of not enough arms, too much hands.

Is it right to make criticisms of a tender "prodigy"? Yes—besides which, at eighteen, Lang is not, in pianistic terms, terribly young. His "prodigy" days are behind him. But he is a capable and exciting young musician, which is good enough.

To conclude the concert, Temirkanov led the orchestra in one of the glorious symphonies of Dvořák (more of the Czech presence), the Eighth. This was a straightforward account, with brisk tempos and no nonsense. Yet it was rather too blunt, asking for a little more bend or nuance. The movement marked Allegretto grazioso could have done with more Bohemian swagger and lilt, and the hymn that ends the symphony—reminiscent of the hymn that concludes Brahms's First Symphony—didn't lift as it should. Nonetheless, Yuri Temirkanov is a major and compelling conductor, and he is continuing, and enhancing, a distinguished musical tradition in Baltimore.

On May 5, James Levine brought the Metropolitan orchestra and chorus, and a squad of soloists, into Carnegie Hall for a performance of Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*. He and his troops were greeted with a tumultuous ovation—not just for their general excellence, but for the Verdi *Requiem* they had delivered in this same hall the week before, one of the most successful concerts of the season.

The *Gurrelieder* is a strange and awesome work, composed over many years and reflecting, in a way, Schoenberg's evolution as a composer. The lead soloist was the Canadian tenor Ben Heppner, assuming the part of Waldemar. He was in top form, but unfortunately he often had to struggle to be heard over the orchestra. He should not have had to; this was a (rare) misjudgment by Levine. One could see Heppner straining—red-faced, veins bulging—but could hear nothing. He might as well have not been up there, and Schoenberg surely didn't intend that. When he could get through, however, Heppner was smooth, regal, and beautiful. There was almost none of the pinched, strangled sound to which he is prone. I should say that I have criticized him severely over the years—especially for his Tristan and his Florestan (from *Fidelio*), for which he is celebrated—but I have never heard him better than in the *Gurrelieder*. This was singing of a high order.

The part of Tove was taken by the American soprano Deborah Voigt, who was at her refulgent best, pouring forth an unrippled ocean of sound. The music allowed her to show off her lower register, which is startlingly bold and moving. A critic simply runs out of ways to praise Voigt: when she is on, as she frequently is, she is well nigh faultless. Alongside her as the Wood Dove was the Lithuanian mezzo-soprano Violeta Urmana, fresh from her triumph as Kundry in the Met's *Parsifal*. Urmana does not have a particularly distinctive voice—it is like a lot of others—but she can do a great deal with it. She has a gift for characterization, and she is always musically incisive. Her monologue at the end of Part I was hair-raising.

Matthew Polenzani—just off *The Makropulos Case*—provided some comic relief as Klaus the Jester. His singing was tidy and strong. As the Peasant, Richard Paul Fink, an American baritone, was rich and manly. And it was heartwarming to see Ernest Haefliger, the Swiss tenor, now eighty-two, in the role of the Speaker. He gave a most musical rendering of his (spoken) part, and he even did a little singing, which is to say, he lapsed into some singing, and it was wonderful. It was further heartwarming to see him give reassuring, paternal pats to the (much younger) tenors who were his fellow performers for the day.

The Met chorus was characteristically disciplined and effective, as was the orchestra. James Levine led an intensely virile, muscular performance, which ended in the blinding light of C major, reminding us of the varied and astonishing career of that pesky master, Schoenberg.

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Music

Berg's femmes fatales

by Alexander Coleman

In *The Dyer's Hand* (1962), W. H. Auden noted that implausibility is the stuff of opera. Librettists revel in shopworn stage conventions—selected villains and nobles, cross-dressers and crossed identities, fluently managed hide-and-seek, violence and the rough stuff just at the right moment. Few operas take this to the extreme of Alban Berg's *Lulu*. It stretches plausibility and even melodrama to the breaking point. But *Lulu* is more than just an expressionist experiment; it is also a commentary on opera's melodramatic clichés, ironically gesturing toward many an opera past. In a very low bow to Da Ponte and Hoffmansthal, for example, *Lulu* features a "trouser" role.

The libretto was drawn from two dramas by Frank Wedekind. Lulu is a young low life from some German city, without genealogy or credentials. She is called Lulu most of the time, but is also known variously as Eve, Nelly, and Mignon. She exercises the hypnotic, sultry allure commanded by Dietrich's Blue Angel, but is less throaty and mannish; the role is for a coloratura, reaching up to a high "D." On the way up in society, her stage demeanor is implacably thoughtless and flighty; on the way down, she is robotic, with ever more perceptible traces of the tragic.

The opera begins in a painter's studio. Lulu is posing. Dr. Goll, her first husband (the first we know about, that is), forces his way into the studio, catching his wife with the aroused portrait painter. The doctor collapses and dies. Lulu promptly marries the painter, who is then apprised by Dr. Schoen, a newspaper tycoon, that Lulu has been Schoen's mistress. The painter, beside himself with jealousy, cuts his throat. Desperate to free himself from Lulu's charms, Dr. Schoen takes his fiancée to see her dance at a cabaret, hoping that Lulu will relinquish her hold on him. Instead, she stalks off the stage and, as a sign of her hypnotic power over him, dictates a letter for Schoen to write out, announcing that his engagement is over.

Lulu is now married to Dr. Schoen. Their ménage includes his son Alwa, a composer besotted with Lulu; the mysterious, decrepit Schigolch—Lulu's protector and a mythic "Father Time" figure—and the Countess Geschwitz, a potential lesbian lover of Lulu (at least in her own mind). In gruesome but comic exasperation—"Thirty years I've labored, and this is my life at home!"—Schoen hands Lulu a pistol for her to kill herself. Instead she finishes off Schoen with five shots. Lulu is arrested and sent to prison. But Countess Geschwitz replaces her. Alwa and Lulu come together, embracing on the same couch where his father bled to death. Lulu hints that she also poisoned the first Mrs. Schoen, Alwa's mother.

The third act begins in Paris in a luxurious salon full of bankers and gamblers. Lulu, more penurious than ever, is in danger of being sold as a prostitute to a Cairene brothel. She and Alwa barely escape

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from the police. The final scene: a London garret, Lulu, accompanied by the remains of her retinue, has become a streetwalker. She returns successively with a silent professor, a black African prince (who, on his way out, crushes Alwa's skull), and Jack the Ripper, who slashes Lulu and (also on his way out) the ever anguished Geschwitz, who has made futile moves to aid Lulu and who utters a final cry: "Lulu! My angel! Appear once more to me! For I am near, I'm always near. For evermore!" ("Im Ewigkeit!").

This Spring the Metropolitan Opera revived John Dexter's 1979 production. (The first complete performances of the opera at the Met had been given the season after the completed three-act version was first staged in Paris on February 24, 1979). At particular moments during the performances (the sudden death of Dr. Goll right at the beginning of the opera, for instance), titters were heard from the Met audience. Some serious Bergians were perturbed at this disruption of mood, but the grotesqueries of the libretto demonstrate Berg's belief that true seriousness embraces the comic. It is full of slapstick moments, such as Schigolch's wheezy asthma as he climbs the stairs or his banana-peel pratfalls on Dr. Schoen's slippery parquet floors ("Diese Parketten!!").

Given the demonic, stringent nature of the musical organization of the work and its heightened expressive musical vocabulary, the settings must anchor themselves realistically in the atmosphere and *Stimmung* indicated by Wedekind and Berg. The highest compliments must be paid to the Met for its realization. The painter's studio, Lulu's dressing room, the Parisian salon, even the London garret brought home to the audience the nasty and gruesome happenings. The sets at the Met give off that "sticky, perfumed, sultry, unhealthy atmosphere" which Stefan Zweig recalled in his memoir of old Vienna, *The World of Yesterday*, and that is all to the good.

Special praise must also go to the Lulu herself, Christine Schaefer, who, with the slightest of physical presences on the stage, magnetically drew the audience into her heedless and insouciant world. During the two intermissions, I couldn't help but overhear learned comparisons concerning previous Lulus such as Teresa Stratas, Anja Silja, and Evelyn Lear, but there seemed to be general agreement that Ms. Schaefer had at least equalled, and possbily excelled, her predecessors. It was a splendid characterization. Ms. Schaefer's performance perfectly captured the spirit of Berg's female Don Giovanni, hardly needing a "catalogue aria" to brag of her conquests. It is also gratifying to note that this production, almost completely sold out this Spring, will reappear, along with *Wozzeck*, during next season.

One of the constants in the critical commentary about Berg concerns the distance between the affable Viennese aristocrat and the two stories he chose to set to music. Of the thirteen works he left behind at his sudden death on Christmas Eve in 1935, *Wozzeck* and *Lulu* are indisputably his masterpieces. Berg's unhappy service in the Austrian Army is the obvious biographical correlative to *Wozzeck*. But the parallels to Lulu are buried deeper.

Berg first saw *Pandora's Box*, one of Wedekind's two Lulu plays, at an intimate local theater in Vienna in 1905 when he was twenty. Tilly Newes (the future Mrs. Frank Wedekind) played Lulu, Wedekind himself was Jack the Ripper, and Karl Kraus played the African prince. The performance made an indelible and overwhelming impression on Berg. Wedekind, along with Freud, was positing an unresolvable conflict between instincts and civilization. In a letter of 1907, Berg noted that "At last we have come to the realization that sensuality is not a weakness . . . rather, it is an immense strength that lies in us—the pivot of all being and thinking. (Yes; all thinking!)." It is not certain that Berg ever saw Louise Brooks in Pabst's film *Pandora's Box* (1929) though, movie buff that he was, it is likely. Wedekind's steamy world went on roiling, with all its implications for explicit sensuous eruptions into civil life, in Berg's head. He started to work on *Lulu* in the late 1920s,

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suffering constant interruptions and frequent despair of ever finishing.

In 1911, Berg married Helene Nahowski. The nature of their relationship is still an enigma. Husband and wife both connived in the public depiction of an ideal marriage, summed up in a 1965 biography of Berg as "even the man happy enough to have enjoyed the more intimate personal acquaintance of the couple can only have a vague idea what this woman came to mean to him. No one could completely grasp what she meant to the *artist* Alban Berg no less than to the *man*." Perhaps, but one can't help noticing that they were apart a good deal of the time and that Helene rarely accompanied Berg on his increasingly triumphal foreign expeditions after the premiere and attendant publicity concerning *Wozzeck*. She remained behind in Vienna or frequented some of her favorite spas. He wrote to her everyday, though, when away. In a way, he feared her; her nephew, describing Helene years later, said that "She wanted to be the only Berg."

During an unaccompanied trip to Prague in 1925, Berg met Alma Mahler Werfel's sister-in-law—that is, Franz Werfel's sister, Hanna Fuchs-Robettin, a married woman with two children, wife of a wealthy industrialist. Six months later, he was back in Prague, this time reassuring the mildly suspicious Helene that "It goes against the grain, really, to have to reassure you about me and Mopinka [Hanna's nickname]." Helene was right to feel uneasy. Hanna Fuchs-Robettin was the love of Berg's life, and his letters to her are cast in a language never directed at his wife. "Not a day passes," he wrote in October 1931, "not half a day, not a night, when I do not think of you, not a week when I am not suddenly flooded by yearning, which submerges all my thoughts and feelings and wishes in an ardor that is not weaker by a breath than that of May 1925." In effect, all of Berg's work after 1925 is secretly touched by this unfulfilled and probably unconsummated romance.

On August 11, 1935, Berg noted in a letter to a friend that "an insect sting exactly at the lower end of the backbone led—a crescendo lasting days—to a frightfully painful abscess that takes away all my pleasure. At the moment, it seems to be subsiding." Helene Berg—avaricious, simply cheap, or monstrous, as the case may be—had operated on the cyst at the base of her husband's spine with a sterilized (she thought) nail file or scissors, thereby saving a trip to the doctor. They would never consult a doctor or surgeon, and by December Berg was in the filthy general ward of a local hospital, suffering from severe blood poisoning. He died on Christmas Eve.

Lulu was left with a small number of measures unorchestrated. Helene would never allow a complete performance of the opera, and that first peformance in 1979 followed hard on her death in 1976. The more the listener moves into the central psychic concerns of *Lulu*, the closer we are to the deepest drives of Berg's own creativity, hidden as it was by his surface life—his own treatment of the conflict between bourgeois custom and order against feeling and sexual passion—Wedekind again. Thus, the essence of Berg lies in the opposition between opposing selves, with multiple ramifications. As George Perle puts it, "on the one hand, an extraordinary intensity of feeling, and on the other, an unprecedented abstraction and rigor in the musical design, in the working out of musical ideas, and in the very shape of the themes."

In the structure and casting of the dramatis personae of *Lulu*, there are a series of clever recapitulations and duplications. Thus, Dr. Schoen also takes on the role of Jack the Ripper, the painter later takes on the role of the African Prince, etc. There is an avenging symmetry here. The musical materials are continually recapitulated and recast; these musical leitmotivs have particular effect in act three where they recall Lulu's fabulous past.

As for Berg's "eternal beloved," he had already carefully planted an indication of his love in his "Lyric Suite"—the musical

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equivalents of the initials HF (Hanna Fuchs, of course) and AB are the key structural elements (H, pronounced "ha," is B natural in German musical spelling) as revealed by George Perle in a 1977 article—without Helene being aware. (Berg also gave Hanna a richly annotated printed pocket score of the work, done with inks of various colors.) And so, it was utterly inevitable that it would be finally revealed (thanks again to George Perle) that the final chord of *Lulu*, sounding after Countess Geschwitz's avowal of eternal love for Lulu beyond the grave, would have, as its lowest note "F," and as the highest in the chord "H," Berg once again indicating in music that Hanna Fuchs would remain with him as long as he lived and worked.

How do we interpret Helene Berg's intransigent refusal to have *Lulu* published or presented as a finished opera? Was it revenge at having found out that she was a displaced muse, or was it simple distaste for the work? Whatever, it was, there was a final emotional truth for Alban Berg, well outside of the realms of his marriage and within the glories and innovations of his music. Alban Berg represented the limitless future of German music. His death at age fifty can only be seen as a senseless tragedy.

Concert note

The Guarneri String Quartet,
at Carnegie Hall, New York.

The best way to hear chamber music, someone said many years ago, is through the feet. By which he meant that, optimally, one should be so close to the players that the cello's vibrations—and even sympathetic ones from the other strings—would communicate from the floor as well as the air. Today chamber music, alas, is rarely encountered through the feet, which may or may not have led to its relative obscurity vis-à-vis the other musical performing arts, but which certainly has led to a change in aesthetic appreciation.

There are other factors as well. In the days of the Flonzaley, or even the Budapest, Quartet, the audiences would be largely made up of those who had at least attempted the works being played, had studied the scores, and had, when new works entered the canon—notably Bartók's six—a genuine interest in at least giving them a run-through. Quartet playing, of course, still exists as a diversion, discipline, or relaxation for many—the *violon d'Ingres* is hardly unstrung—but it is today a sidelight rather than a centrality. It is probable that most of those in the audience for today's chamber music recitals have never played through a Haydn—much less a Bartók—quartet.

And yet the quartet recital has refused to go out of fashion, and despite the groans from classical music critics this brazenly elitist form of musical expression is currently enjoying a resurgent popularity not only in New York but across the United States. String quartets are in residence at several universities and conservatories, and new ones are formed almost yearly. The recent Shostakovich cycle by the Emerson Quartet, at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center, played to an enthusiastic audience; next season will see a traversal of the six Bartóks in one (long) afternoon.

Quartets come and go and change personnel, but one mark of the form is the longevity of its exemplars—in the past, the Budapest; more recently, the Tokyo, the Juilliard, and the Guarneri. The last, since its inception in 1964, has arrogated a place to itself as the Cadillac of the field, in all senses of that term. The Guarneri Quartet has almost become an industry in itself, spawning at least three books (one by its first violinist, Arnold Steinhardt), one documentary, and, of course, a plethora of recordings. It regularly receives plaudits from the critics; the major knock on the group has been that the machinery is almost too fine-tuned, at the expense of emotional depth—a whiff of Virgil Thomson's categorization of Heifetz's violin playing as "silk-underwear music."

The Guarneri has achieved a consistency

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and continuity because its personnel has never changed—certainly a longevity record—but its concert May 9 at Carnegie Hall signaled a first: the cellist, David Soyer, in his late seventies, is retiring in favor of Peter Wiley, and the second and final piece on the program was chosen to showcase the two: Schubert's C Major Quintet, D. 956.

A capacity audience of Guarneri devotees assembled for this farewell, and a commemorative book of informal photographs was included with the program. Acclaim, tribute, and love were the order of the evening, with the obligatory standing ovation, in this case justified in terms of the stature of the group.

And yet, as many in attendance knew, the years take their toll. In the highly exposed realm of the string quartet, it is impossible to hide, and the effects of age were palpable, if not finally controlling because of the rapport of the four and the almost-unconscious response to each other's playing.

The program had originally been scheduled to begin with Beethoven's late Opus 132 quartet in A minor, a work with a lyrical and deeply felt slow movement, akin to that in the Schubert. But at some point Beethoven's B flat major Opus 130 was substituted, and that is a cat of a far more feral nature. In addition, the Guarneri programmed the first version of that quartet, in which Beethoven, after putting the players through a gruelling obstacle course of five contrasting movements, topped it all off with a gigantic fugue; certainly one of the knottiest in the literature. Beethoven was persuaded to ditch the movement—publishing it separately as the "Grosse Fuge"—in favor of a more conventional finale, but recently quartets have been going back to his first idea, feeling it to be what he really, in his heart of hearts, wanted.

The quartet bristles with difficulties—what must have been transpiring inside Beethoven's deaf head!—with rhythmic jerks and starts, dynamic hairpins littering the pages and the buzzing of trills everywhere. Decisions must be made on practically every bar, and yet there must be a spontaneity in the performance, and an ability to shift "on the fly," as the four-wheel-drive ads say. The first three bars of the piece, in fact, present such a decision: the first two climax on a crescendo, with the third a *subito piano*. How exactly is it to be phrased?

As can be imagined, few quartets cope with equal brilliance in all the tests that Beethoven sets in the Opus 130, and yet give, as any performance must, a compelling account of the work. The Guarneri were at their strongest in the songlike fifth-movement Cavatina, where they made manifest Beethoven's reputed comment that this melody went directly to his soul. The gnarled, quicksilver second movement lacked proper articulation at speed and was more smeared than set forward; throughout, the Guarneri underplayed the dynamic contrasts innate to late Beethoven, and edging into that terrible Slough of Despond, the eternal mezzoforte. In addition, intonation problems interfered with the optimal clarity.

The fugue itself should not surrender easily, and they tackled it with determination and, finally, resolution, so that the wiriness of Steinhardt's current playing contributed to the sense of struggle overcome that this movement must convey.

The Schubert arrived, after intermission, as a healing balm, and its seemingly uncomplicated yet magisterial musical gestures were affectingly, if not heart-stoppingly, set forward. It mattered little, however, for the celebratory nature of the event—even though a farewell—overrode all.

—Patrick J. Smith

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The media

Melancholy facts

by James Bowman

Journalists of today like to call what they write "the rough draft of history," but this is only true if you assume that history will share the interests and values of the journalists. Admittedly, there are few signs as yet that it will not. There is no reason that I know of to suppose that subsequent generations of the English-speaking American elites will be any less devoted to pop-cultural trivia and stories of the heroes of our various "liberations" from traditional restraints than today's are. Yet it does seem just possible that they might also recover an interest in more traditional kinds of heroes, in which case they may find the rough draft our times have bequeathed them a little bit inadequate, particularly when it comes to military men.

This is to some extent a worldwide problem. In March Peter Oborne, political columnist of the London *Daily Express*, wrote an article for *The Spectator* titled "Of Hacks and Heroes," in which he argued that the attention given by the British media to the deaths of two prominent journalists, Auberon Waugh and John Diamond, was a sign of the increasing self-obsession of the British press and media culture. At roughly the same time that these two hacks bit the dust, a number of men with what once were thought to be rather impressive accomplishments to their credit, including "Johnnie" Johnson, Britain's top air ace of the Second World War, also died and were accorded little more than respectful obituaries.

> To ask whether some fundamental sense of proportion has been hopelessly lost in all this is not to question the quality of Waugh and Diamond as journalists [wrote Mr. Oborne], or their decency and goodness as human beings. . . . But the fact that the death of a fine journalist is now deemed to merit coverage on a far grander scale than the death of a war hero, a great industrialist and a great entrepreneur is a striking contemporary phenomenon.

He goes on to compare his country's most prominent journalistic practitioners to the aristocrats of yesteryear. "The great dynasties of Dimbleby, Waugh, Lawson, and so forth come close to commanding the same kind of reverence as the ducal families in Walpole's London"—except that they bring with their social prestige only "media-class values—showy rather than deep, transient not long-term, clever not wise, sentimental and not compassionate" which "are dangerous to the health and longevity of any nation."

All this may be true enough for Britain, but if so it comes far short of stating the seriousness of the American case. For all the meretriciousness and shallowness of the British media, it has a long way still to go before it catches up with ours in sheer self-obsession. "Johnnie" Johnson was at least accorded full and detailed obituaries in all the major newspapers of Britain, as are other veterans of the Second World War al-

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most every day. This is not true of America's "newspaper of record," *The New York Times*. The melancholy fact of actuarial reality means that now and probably for the next ten years not a day will go by when hundreds of veterans of the Second World War won't die, ten or a dozen of whom must have a claim to be genuine heroes. Most of the lives of the others would yield up at least one or two thrilling stories, could anyone be bothered to find them out, and in Britain, at least, some of them are going onto the record. Here follows a partial list of the obituaries of veterans of that war, most over 1000 words long, that appeared during the month of April in the *Times* or *The Daily Telegraph*, often in both.

N. G. L. Hammond, a Greek scholar who put his expertise in the classics to use with the Allied Military Mission to Greece. There he became an expert in explosives, was promoted to lieutenant-colonel, was twice mentioned in dispatches, and was awarded the DSO for his work organizing guerrilla operations behind enemy lines. After the war he wrote an account of his experiences titled *Venture into Greece*. He went on to become headmaster of Clifton College and professor of Greek at the University of Bristol, and to edit the second edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

Lt. General Sir Derek Lang who as a member of the 4th Battalion of Cameron Highlanders of the 51st (Highland) Division covering the retreat and evacuation of the main British force at Dunkirk, fought heroically at St Valéry-en-Caux in June 1940. When he was eventually taken prisoner by the advancing Germans, he swiftly escaped and made his way across France to Marseilles, where he stowed away on a ship bound for Beirut and from there made his way to re-join the British army in Palestine. For this exploit he was awarded the Military Cross, and he later published a book, *Return to St Valéry: An Escape through Wartime France*. After the Normandy invasion he had the satisfaction of leading the 5th Battalion of Camerons in the recapture of St Valéry.

Squadron Leader John Wright who, while flying Liberator bombers for the RAF Coastal Command, became the first British pilot to attack a German U-boat, U-456, with the revolutionary new acoustic torpedo in 1943. The submarine was damaged and finally sunk the next day by a Royal Canadian Air Force Sunderland bomber. Wright was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his exploit. He later won a bar for his DFC for sinking another U-boat. After the war, as a pilot for British South African Airways, his cool landing of an airliner with only one landing gear at Lima, Peru won him a citation from the city of Lima, as a "magnifico piloto."

Admiral Sir Charles Madden, son of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Madden, who joined the Royal Navy at the age of thirteen in 1920 and himself rose to become Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet in the 1960s. During the war he served as second in command of the battleship *Warspite* and took part in the battles of Calabria and Matapan and the bombardment of Tripoli, among other actions. During the evacuation of Crete the *Warspite* was bombed twice, and Madden led the fire and rescue parties. In 1944 he was given command of the escort carrier *Emperor*, with its complement of twenty-four Hellcat fighters, which served in the Far East. He was mentioned in dispatches for his service on both ships.

Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Delaval Cotter, Bt, who, as an officer of the 13th/18th Royal Hussars, led one of the first tank squadrons to come ashore on D-day. Two months later he won a DSO for his service in the battle for Mont Pinçon, south of Aunay-sur-Odon, clearing the village of La Varinière of enemy troops and holding it for twenty-four hours against fierce counterattacks until he could be reinforced. After the war he served in Malaya and retired from the army in 1959.

Major General David Lloyd Owen, who as commander from 1943 to 1945 of the Long Range Desert Group, a reconnaissance unit

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composed largely of men who had prewar experience in exploring the desert, won the MC for his part in the joint raid on Tobruk by the LRDG and the SAS in September 1942. Later he won the DSO for his leadership of clandestine forces in Albania, in spite of a severe spinal injury sustained in a fall when parachuting into that country. After the war he wrote memoirs entitled *The Desert My Dwelling Place* (1957) and *Providence Their Guide* (1980).

AIR VICE-MARSHAL PATRICK O'CONNOR who as station medical officer at Sullom Voe, the Coastal Command's base in the Shetland Islands, saved the life of John Cruickshank, a pilot whose action in returning his Catalina flying boat back to base while severely wounded won him the Victoria Cross. In the words of the *Telegraph*'s obituary, "As he boarded the aircraft, [O'Connor] immediately realised that only a blood transfusion on the spot would give its pilot, Cruickshank, any chance of survival. Using such limited equipment as he had available, including a chamber pot, O'Connor stabilised the wounded man sufficiently to move him to hospital." After the war as a specialist in neuropsychiatry at the RAF Hospital, Halton, Buckinghamshire, he acquired a reputation for the treatment of alcoholism and phobias among serving RAF personnel.

CAPTAIN DONALD MCEWEN, a fourth-generation naval officer who as navigating officer of the light cruiser *Aurora* helped his ship earn the sobriquet "the Silver Phantom" from the Italian press for its ability suddenly to appear and disappear at strategic moments. He was awarded the DSC for his part in the sinking of an entire escorted convoy of seven Italian merchant ships laden with men and supplies for Rommel's Afrika Korps. He was later mentioned in dispatches for a similar action against Italian transports and for his role in the sinking of three ships of the Vichy French navy that were attempting to frustrate the allied landing at Oran during Operation Torch. After the war he continued in the navy until 1961 and fathered a son who is now also a retired naval captain.

MAJOR D'ARCY MANDER who, following his escape from a prisoner-of-war train in northern Italy in 1943, made his way to German-occupied Rome and on his own initiative set up a clandestine intelligence-gathering operation. Twice arrested by the Gestapo, he "managed to free himself," in the words of the *Telegraph*'s obituary, "only by the greatest ingenuity." In commending his "courage and resource" his DSO citation noted that "The decision to carry out such work was entirely his own and in the conduct of it he was unassisted by any official Allied POW organisation. There is no doubt that this officer made an important contribution to the success of our espionage and counter-espionage efforts." After the war he continued his career in the army and was mentioned in dispatches for his actions as commander of the 1st Battalion of the Green Howards in Malaya. He later published a memoir of his war experiences, *Mander's March on Rome* (1987).

SQUADRON LEADER TONY BARTLEY, an RAF Spitfire ace of the Battle of Britain who was awarded the DFC after eight confirmed victories over enemy aircraft in 1940. As a test pilot for Vickers-Supermarine the following year, Bartley made important contributions to subsequent versions of the Spitfire and performed the stunt flying for the film about the Spitfire's designer, R. J. Mitchell, *The First of The Few* (1942), starring Leslie Howard. After the war, he married the actress Deborah Kerr (they were divorced in 1958) and went into film and television production. He, too, published a memoir, *Smoke Trails in the Sky* (1984).

LT-COL ANGUS CAMERON, a grandson of the Clan Chief, Cameron of Lochiel, and son of a company commander of the Cameron Highlanders killed in France in 1914, the year of his birth. Cameron won the MC while commanding a company of the Scots Guards during the invasion of Germany in March of 1945. Trapped by heavy fire from two directions, the company misplaced one of its platoons when the platoon commander was wounded. "With complete disregard for his personal safety," Cameron single-handedly reassembled his

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company, continued his advance, and held his position for eighteen hours under heavy fire. His citation for the Military Cross read: "Throughout the operation Major Cameron, by his splendid example of courage and leadership, held the morale of his company at the highest level in spite of frequent casualties from enemy mortar fire." After the war he commanded a battalion during the Malayan emergency and retired in 1956 to the family estate in Scotland.

Major Sir George FitzGerald, Bt, known as "Inky" to his comrades in the pre-war Irish Guards on account of his jet-black hair, won an MC as a company commander during the aftermath of the allied landings at Anzio in Italy in January, 1944. As commander of No. 2 Company of the 1st Battalion of the Irish Guards, FitzGerald was ordered to the front line to relieve an American armored unit. "For three days and four nights," records the *Telegraph*, "soaked by rain and with an icy flood swirling around their knees, they were continually engaged in close-quarter fighting, as well as being sniped at, shelled and mortared. Each German attack was met by an even more ferocious counter-attack. By constantly changing his positions, sending out raiding parties and astutely directing fire, FitzGerald caused heavy enemy losses while conserving his force with great skill."

Wing Commander Edward Barton who, as chief signals and radar officer for the "Pathfinder Force" of Air Vice-Marshal Don Bennett charged with identifying bombing targets in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, developed "Oboe," a method of blind bombing to radio signals. Though desk bound for much of the war, he made it a point of honor to make frequent sorties as navigator on Mosquito and Lancaster bombers bound for Germany to keep up to date, and on one occasion personally made a daring landing in occupied France to retrieve "Oboe" equipment from a Mosquito that had been shot down, lest it fall into enemy hands.

During the same month, *The New York Times* found space to run obituaries of business and labor leaders, sports stars and entertainers, civil servants and advertising men and several heroes of the civil rights movement, but only one American soldier. If you want to know something about the late James J. McManus, the proprietor of the Peter McManus Café in the Chelsea district of Manhattan, which often appeared in the movies and on television, or John B. Oakes, a liberal editorial writer for, um, *The New York Times*, or Trinh Cong Son, an anti-war protest singer from Vietnam, known as "the Bob Dylan of Vietnam," or Theodore McCarty, the former president of Gibson guitars who designed several of that company's most celebrated products, or Harvey R. Ball, the designer of the smiley face, or Robert Moon, one of the inventors of the ZIP code, or Chester L. Posey, one of the inventors of the Exxon Tiger, or Gene Thompson, a novelist and former writer for such television shows as "Gilligan's Island" and "The Beverly Hillbillies," *The New York Times* is the place to look. But only six-hundred words on Lt. Carlos Ogden, a winner of the Medal of Honor during the post-D-day assault on Cherbourg, witness to the prowess of American arms.

Are there so many fewer American military men than British? Are American soldiers less brave or less interesting? Do they have fewer good stories to be told about them? I doubt it. But their feats of valor are not even a footnote to the rough draft of history that *The New York Times* is writing. You might almost think that the ruling classes of "the world's only remaining superpower" and undisputed world hegemon had lost their appetite for tales of military glory. But then perhaps the future readers of the historical draft of our century will have come to think of warfare and all that pertains to it as mere relics of man's primitive past—as do (one suspects) the editors of *The New York Times*.

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Verse chronicle

Folk tales

by William Logan

Louise Glück has become our Persephone of quiet hurt and bruised longing. When she says, with professional sorrow, "I even loved a few times in my disgusting human way," you know she'd rather be one of Ovid's heifers or laurel trees, punished for being loved by a god. In *Vita Nova* (1996) and *Meadowlands* (1999), she used the classical world to underwrite the collapse of a marriage (a disturbing number of Homeric characters were eager to impersonate her). Glück has seen the myths behind modern love, seen them for the lies they are—and she's *glad* they are lies.

A poet who writes a book called *The Seven Ages*[1] has been thinking about her past, not about *As You Like It*. Glück's childhood at times shimmers like a folk tale (one that starts in the Black Forest and ends in the suburbs), a tale at the source of adult unhappiness. Freud long ago taught us to stare at the child for the angst of the adult, and his fairy tale is as persuasive as any recorded by Grimm (if Freud was wrong, many adults will have a lot of explaining to do). Looking back, Glück sees two bored little girls, herself and her sister, in the endless summer of childhood. They were living on an island, she says, and they sound marooned until you remember it's Long Island.

> Long Island. Terrible
> storms off the Atlantic, summer rain
> hitting the gray shingles. I watched
> the copper beech, the dark leaves turning
> a sort of lacquered ebony. It seemed to be
> secure, as secure as the house.

A sort of. Seemed to be. Glück is wary of a noun's finality, cautious of an adjective's definition. She and her sister may be the only philosophers to work out a theory of perception based on the difference between fingernail polish wet in the bottle and dry on the nail. It's one of the cheeriest moments in this icy and eviscerated book.

Glück's poems might have been spoken by one of the shades of Erebos, come to taste the blood offered by Odysseus. Her tone is full of the dead's bewildered sense of injustice, their wounded and angry conviction. Her solemn memories of childhood have as much foreboding as the mild suburbs can manage. It's hard for her to convince the reader she wasn't a pampered child with a taste for despair—she loves the adolescent hunger before knowledge, the ignorance we name innocence.

Glück knows you have to be a masochist to read her (and many readers are—why else be readers?). "Why should my poems not imitate my life?," she asks, and she means they must be cold, attenuated, stunned as if struck by a hammer. "Why do I suffer?," she asks. "Why am I ignorant?" Such raw questions, written after the end of love, the end

1 *The Seven Ages*, by Louise Glück; Ecco Press, 68 pages, $23.

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of eros, don't want answers—they revel in their long-suffering suffering.

Glück's hatred of the lushness of metaphor, the sweetness of words, has thinned her poems to bare skeletons of prose. She reaches toward immensities as if choosing a laundry detergent.

> All the defenses, the spiritual rigidity, the insistent
> unmasking of the ordinary to reveal the tragic,
> were actually innocence of the world.
> Meaning the partial, the shifting, the mutable—
> all that the absolute excludes. I sat in the dark, in the living room.

At times she forgets she's writing poems, the language is so brute with abstraction (she lives so much in the abstract, it's as if her lovers were undistributed middles). She has whipped her poems into tedious resentment, into unremitting, sometimes luxuriating angst. Glück believes love is inadequate and, if not, that we will make it so; for a few startled moments, in her ecstasy of grief, you see a woman standing naked in her own elegy. She remains a guarded and feverish poet (even the punctuation seems unhappy to be here), a poet of unearthly gifts all too eager to lose them. There's no poet quite so in love with her own pain, no contemporary purer in her extremity—she has the gorgeous gloominess of Sylvia Plath, her angers scrunched up like damp handkerchiefs. How cheerfully Glück will go, when her poems have jettisoned everything they can, into poor Jaques's final scene: *Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.*

Anne Carson is not just odd, she's Canadian. A classics scholar, she delights in confusing the contemporary with the classical—the book that brought her general attention, *Autobiography of Red* (1998), retold the story of the monster Geryon as if he were a modern winged boy. She's used to the palimpsests of the ancient world, the vellums that leak the secrets of old erasures; her poems often force one text to shine through another. *The Beauty of the Husband*[2] superimposes passages (often deletions or second thoughts) by John Keats, our great poet of eros and thwarted appetites, over the story of a collapsing marriage. The book is subtitled "a fictional essay in 29 tangos." *What are tangos?*, you might ask. "A tango (like a marriage) is something you have to dance to the end," the dust jacket helpfully explains.

Carson is not afraid to put the unpoetic at risk in poetry. Her poems are full of explanations that aren't quite explanations, of sidelong glances and cul-de-sacs. She loves leading the reader down the garden path, except at the end there isn't any garden. Each of the "tangos" has a title bold as a billboard; for example,

> I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO KEATS (IS IT YOU WHO TOLD ME KEATS WAS A DOCTOR?) ON GROUNDS THAT A DEDICATION HAS TO BE FLAWED IF A BOOK IS TO REMAIN FREE AND FOR HIS GENERAL SURRENDER TO BEAUTY

We never learn how the dedication is flawed, but Carson (a poet as deliciously eccentric as Amy Clampitt) is devoted to *homo ludens*, man the game-player and dreamer. Her poems are often whimsical if slightly aggressive games though you're never sure you've been told the rules. She writes in deadpan prose, the sort Buster Keaton might have perfected; most of the humor in this long book of marital disaster comes from the delivery:

> And upstairs that night, which proved a long night, as he was dragging
> his wounded honor about the hotel room like a damaged queen of moths
> because she mentioned Houyhnhnms and he objected
> to being "written off as an object of satire," they moved
> several times through a cycle of remarks like—

2 *The Beauty of the Husband*, by Anne Carson; Alfred A. Knopf, 151 pages, $22.

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What is this, what future is there
I thought
You said
We never
What exactly day year name anything who I
was who I am who did you
Did you or did you not

This dreadful couple, with their tennis match of accusations, are wrong from the start. He's a pathological liar with a taste for adultery. She seems erotic as a potato and charitable as a vulture. We never understand the marriage (the wife claims the secret was "Beauty. No great secret. Not ashamed to say I loved him for his beauty"), but that makes it only as mysterious as most marriages.

Carson's scatty, off-center patter keeps this dysfunctional pair more fascinating than they should be (old tales must never be old in the telling). She might say digression is the most powerful tool in argument—that we come at the truth crabwise, if we come at all. If the husband writes his mistress, he borrows a phrase Andromache used as she parted from Hector. The wife—of course she finds the letter, of course the phrase has been pilfered from her (she may be a classics scholar)—natters on about loyalty, beauty, sex, then animal mimicry (a harmless species patterned like a poisonous one), and finally the war games that obsess her husband. Her scatty associations take only half a page, but at the end you know this couple as well as you know your shrieking neighbors. "Jealousy," says the wife, "formed no small part of my relationship to the Battle of Borodino."

The Beauty of the Husband is a sublimely funny improvisation, a cracked and updated version of George Meredith's *Modern Love*, that much neglected work. Carson has been mistaken for a postmodernist, but she's far too tame and too morbid for that—she rides the hint of autobiography without ever confessing a thing. She's conservative in her ends if wicked in her means (the avant-garde is often the testing ground for techniques better used elsewhere). Like all originals, she forces herself on your attention in a slightly irritating way—Linnaeus might have been stumped by her mixture of rhetoric both antique and postmodern (rhetorically, she's a platypus). She can be silly, meager in conception, slapdash in execution, yet we haven't had for a long while a poet who could rescue the classical world from becoming a suburb of academia—to find the last, you'd have to go back to Lowell. She has discovered, in the nerves of human relation, a subject adequate to her singular and strange resources.

The literature of alcohol wasn't written for alcoholics, but at times it's hard for anyone but an alcoholic to read it. How boring other people's addictions are! (How fascinating your own.) I've tried many times to finish *Under the Volcano*, tried to fall under the spell of *Tender Is the Night*, but, when the frail boat of prose launches onto the vast sea of alcohol, I'd rather order a dry martini. A few great poems may have been written under the stimulus of alcohol or opium (though far more have probably died stillborn), yet great poems are rarely about taking drugs—Keats only pretends to in "Ode to a Nightingale." Franz Wright, the son of the poet James Wright (himself an alcoholic), wrote into middle-age mostly about his addictions—"Here's one for you, Why does F drink/ (Gives him something to do/ after he shoots up)." I began to think his minimalist, sometimes unpleasant poems, beery as Bukowski, gabby as Frank O'Hara, would collapse into alcoholic stupor. *The Beforelife*[3] is a book of recovery, but if addiction is boring, recovery can be even worse.

We live in a country that after the pursuit of happiness believes in the right to rehab. Wright's earlier poems were all too proud of his outlaw habits; he knows how hard it is to kick an addiction, how suspicious people will be of him ("My name is Franz, and I'm a recovering asshole"). Oc-

3 *The Beforelife*, by Franz Wright; Alfred A. Knopf, 79 pages, $22.

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casionally he jots down some trivial observations or composes a clumsy parable, but his real subject, his only subject, is his affair with himself—and whether his narcissism is whetted by alcohol or worshiped by psychiatrists doesn't make much difference. This would matter less if Wright weren't an artist of concision—his poems are rarely sloppy and have meticulous control of their small means (he's a demonic version of William Carlos Williams). He treats the self-indulgence of the addict with acid humor:

> And you will find me
> any night
> now, try
> at the motherless sky.
> com
>
> How dare you
> interrupt
> me.com
>
> I'm sorry
> I was ever born.com

Like many recovering addicts (recovery is a metaphor drawn from the notion that addiction is a disease—perhaps one day there will be clinics for recovering bank robbers), Wright is less ashamed than angry; his new poems are just as sentimental as his old, only now there's a good deal more sanctimoniousness. When he recalls an aborted child ("Child I helped/ to do away with// you would be/ almost an adult now// I hope my friend") or pleads for love ("Please love me/ And I will play for you/ this poem/ upon the guitar/ I myself made/ out of cardboard and black threads/ when I was ten years old./ Love me or else"), you learn a lot about the most addictive drug of all, the alcohol of self-pity. If Coleridge could write "Kubla Khan" with a tincture of opium, Wright should have gotten more from his multiple addictions than these plodding lines of prose. He hasn't beaten his habits; he's just exchanged one addiction for another.

Anthony Hecht is the most morally intoxicated, the richest yet most severe, of the quarrelsome and diverse generation of American poets born in the 1920s. By the time this group reached college during and after the war, the modernists slept safely in anthologies. Hecht's peers worked largely in a tradition largely mapped. They have been a group, not of innovators, but of craftsmen of the known—even the avant-garde poets among them barked more than they bit. After a bejeweled and cautious beginning, Hecht's poems grew bleak and furious, battering their subjects with the siege equipment of meter and rhyme.

The moody, valedictory poems of *The Darkness and the Light*[4] are more ravaged and humane than any Hecht has written. If his poems were flawed, it was because they were unyielding to the emotions they evoked: they preached vulnerability while remaining invulnerable. Their very precisions left no room for the ambivalence necessary to strong feeling; the purifying light of Hecht's heaven burned hotter than the fire of hell. His writing could be marmoreal but glorious, and at times it still is:

> Etched on the window were barbarous
> thistles of frost,
> Edged everywhere in that tame winter
> sunlight
> With pavé diamonds and fine prickles of ice
> Through which a shaft of the late afternoon
> Entered our room to entertain the sway
> And float of motes, like tiny aqueous lives,
> Then glanced off the silver teapot, raising
> stains
> Of snailing gold upcast across the ceiling.

Such stunning passages are infrequent now. There's rarely the sense that the words could have been chosen no better, could have been chosen by no one else. (Shakespeare's great lines were written as if he'd paid Prospero to conjure the words from thin air; Hecht's lines are calculated like a great

4 *The Darkness and the Light*, by Anthony Hecht; Alfred A. Knopf, 68 pages, $23.

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general's routes of supply or order of battle. You admire the tact of the tactics, but you see how it's done.)

The loosening of control has made Hecht a warmer, more sympathetic poet, but he has lost the fine clinch of his endings, the darkening necessities of his arguments. The poems eke out their occasions: a long series of biblical tales (Lot, Judith, Saul and David, Haman, Samson, and many more—the book is like a biblical epic with Charlton Heston in all the parts) becomes dutiful rewriting by a poet who has rarely been routine. Here is the last stanza on Paul's conversion:

> The Damascene culprits now could rest
> untroubled,
> Their delinquencies no longer the concern
> Of this fallen, converted Pharisee. He rather
> From sighted blindness to blind sight went
> hobbled
> And was led forth to a house where he would
> turn
> His wrath from one recusancy to another.

From one recusancy to another! It sounds like a report by his parole officer.

We accuse a language richer than its meanings of aestheticism, of attending more to the means than the matter (more to the mutter than the moans). Hecht's wordplay could make any reader hold his head in his hands (few poets have so fatal a taste for puns like "the ring-a-ding-*Ding-an-Sich*"). He'll set up a whole sonnet for a ridiculous last line, "In a hollow, deep, engastrimythic voice." (The reader doesn't think, "How remarkable!" He thinks, "Didn't Eliot do much better with 'Polyphiloprogenitive'?"). Hecht's rhymes ring the changes with delicious invention; but when the mood comes over him he'll rhyme *distress, he* with *Jesse* (about as awful as it gets, unless rhyming *cornea* with *California* is even worse).

A poet's talents exist in productive tension for only a decade or so. Before, the language is all main force, the subjects mistaken, the voice immature; after, the poet often hardens into manner, his subjects written to extinction. Very few contemporary poets have written one remarkable book; and almost none has written two as fine as *The Hard Hours* (1967) and *Millions of Strange Shadows* (1977). If we expect less from a poet soon to enter his eighties, we nevertheless recall the rude brilliance of Yeats's last poems, the Stevens of "The Rock," Clampitt in her indomitable seventies. One of the bleakest poems in *The Darkness and the Light* tells a story of the German retreat from Normandy: there's an innocent or not-so-innocent family, a desperate soldier who needs a bicycle, the threat of a gun. It's a well-crafted set piece, but years ago Hecht would have gone further, would have written "'More Light! More Light!'" or "The Cost," or "The Deodand," poems as indispensable to our imaginings of war as the etchings of Goya. As he ages, a poet's main competitor is himself—his younger, ravenous, unforgiving self.

Stephen Dunn is a rational man, probably a good husband and father, a generous and genial neighbor, *homo suburbanus* at his best. He's a poet of daily life, of the dailiness of daily life; you half expect the poems in *Different Hours*[5] to come with classified ads at the end. Dunn's poems are moral in a quiet way, and pedestrian in a loud and guffawing way—he's like a used-car salesman with a conscience.

Dunn knows what he risks as bard of the suburbs—when he writes in praise of dullness, of "year after year/ doing a few same things/ in the same house with the same person," you know dullness is a religion, with its own sacraments and sins. It's a religion for the long haul. Dunn is a craftsman, a journeyman who at sixty-one has published eleven collections; they're honest, hardworking, never particularly profound but never particularly shallow (reading him is like watching someone always waist-deep in the community pool). He writes as if he were figuring out a set of floor plans, and

5 *Different Hours*, by Stephen Dunn; W. W. Norton, 121 pages, $22.

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his subjects are the stuff of scrapbooks (scrapbooks with a little mild philosophizing): a straying wife, a divorce, aging, the army, aging again, the town idiot, a mad dog, a bus station, a lost wallet, worms. If sometimes he writes about the death of God or Odysseus' secret, he treats it just as he treats the mad dog or the lost wallet. He's democratic in his subjects, and democratic in his tastes, because Dunn is a reasonable man.

A lot of American poets are reasonable men. A reasonable man has reasonable thoughts about reasonable things. There's nothing at all remarkable about the man, or the thought, or the thing; but the man thought a thought about the thing, and, by gum, he decided a reasonable reader would like to read it. There's scarcely a word put down in surprise or delight, scarcely a syntax troubled or a metaphor sprung. (As a genius the reasonable man turns out to be Auden and as a misanthrope Larkin—but unless you're a genius or a misanthrope, why bother?)

> Because in large cities the famous truths
> already had been plumbed and debated,
> the metaphysicians of South Jersey lowered
> their gaze, just tried to be themselves.
> They'd gather at coffee shops in Vineland
> and deserted shacks deep in the Pine Barrens.
> Nothing they came up with mattered
> so they were free to be eclectic, and as odd
> as getting to the heart of things demanded.

If such metaphysicians wrote poetry, they'd write the poetry of half measures Dunn prefers, where every phrase carries its cautionary whiff of failure: "of making do with what's been left us," "In the world I can't help/ but live in," "my normal/ dreamy life of uncommitted crimes," "Use what's lying around the house./ Make it simple and sad." It's all a little proud of its ordinariness. If you asked him whether a glass of milk was half empty or half full, he'd grumble, a little plaintively, "Why are you asking *me*?"

Arnold called Pope a classic of our prose, but who now would think Pope prosy? Poets today are masters of prose, but they're not classics—they're the cattle of prose. Indeed, we are a country of prose—we eat prose with our cereal by morn and hear it yakking on television by night. If there's no space for poetry in our busy lives, well, it all happened a long time ago and it hurts the head to think the old poetic way. We're proud of our prosaic mountains and our amber waves of prosaic grain, and if we could sing (if we could sing in prose) that's what we'd sing about. There's nothing exactly wrong with a poet like Dunn, and nothing exactly right, either. You wish he had something to say that wasn't so fresh-paint predictable, so plain-spoken and Rotarian, so gosh-darn dull. You wish he wouldn't be so, well, so reasonable.

Carl Phillips loves to throw little hitches into his sentences, so at the end you can hardly remember how they began—if there's a hell for grammarians, it's parsing a sentence like "It is for, you see, eventually the deer to/ take it, the fruit// hangs there." Every derangement of style must have an advantage equal to its irritations—ruptures in syntax must have more advantage to meaning than disadvantage to the understanding, because punctuation and word order are meant to be gestures nearly invisible. Phillips is trying to draw into print some of the errant energies of speech, the messy character of the said. Berryman was the last poet to wrestle with the angel of syntax and come away bloodied if unbowed, but *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* and *The Dream Songs* now look like period pieces. Phillips has much less to say in *The Tether*[6] and toying with syntax therefore seems merely self-indulgent (just as his poems seem mostly about the progress of their own perceptions).

> to say
>
> I missed things is

6 *The Tether*, by Carl Phillips; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 83 pages, $22.

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it precisely, the all but
unbearably lit
cropscapes—blue-&-soy,
splay, I-mean-to; visible from

miles, the weathered
verticals, like
anomaly on stilts and

corsaged, to say the thin
blades milling, making
more fine a wind
who has seen?

It's beautiful, but wistful and vacant: the substance wouldn't feed a pair of starlings. At best the style forces you to read carefully, a benefit when so many poems seem predigested, masticated by contented cows; at worst, it calls attention to its own pretty emptiness. When Phillips starts throwing parenthetical phrases at you like brickbats—"(come)// (what it most sounded like)// (plunder)"—or merrily ending sentences and poems with dashes (his punctuation resembles street signs: YIELD, DETOUR, BRIDGE OUT AHEAD), you realize he's been reading far too much Jorie Graham.

One poem without such borrowed ornament suggests what this poet might do if less concerned with advertising what he does. The subject is a shard of Roman glass:

That piece in your hands now
—I found it just south of Rome, not far from
the waters that, despite pollution, when
they receive the light reflected off the salmon-,
sky-, oxblood-colored villas that front

the boat-littered bay of Naples, suggest
something, still, of a grand history that is
finally holy, there being always a holiness
attached to that which is absolute—even
should the subject prove, the entire time, to
have been loss.

A poet with such a moral imagination may yet discover a style sufficient to his losses.

Seamus Heaney's new book is comfortable as a pair of old boots.[7] *Electric Light* contains many of the things he does very well, and some of the things he does rather ill (poems about poetry, for instance)—Heaney is such a domesticated poet, one who profits as much as Robert Frost by being domesticated, we may be tempted to undervalue him. Like Frost he's in danger, at the outset of old age (Heaney's sixty-two, and when Frost turned sixty-two he had few good poems left), of succumbing to his manner, of being the stage-Irishman Irishman the poems at times require, a forelock-tugging craftsman, a man with his feet still firmly in the bog and a square of turf for a hat.

Heaney's new poems are backward-looking, rank with the nostalgia of the Fifties and Forties. A poet's childhood, at least according to the poet, is full of incidents almost clairvoyant, when the child seems instinct with the poetic tongue. Awareness of language has to start somewhere, and for a poet such somewheres elicit a peculiarly evocative commemoration, where everything the past pointed forward to now points backward in fulfillment. Heaney is a chronicler of childhood (what would his children's poems be like?). In the best poem of this new book, children try to figure out the connection between the baby doctor and the baby. "All of us came in Doctor Kerlin's bag," or so the children assume—they imagine the ceiling of his surgery strung with baby parts, from which (what else?) he makes the babies. This is hilariously piquant, a snapshot of those most reasonable of scientists, children, working out the order of the world from the most stringent of hypotheses and a little misinformation.

Heaney handles his material with the ease of long use (though this can sometimes seem lackadaisical). He slips along the damp edge of sentiment, but rarely crosses the border into tears.

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7 *Electric Light*, by Seamus Heaney; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 100 pages, $22.

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Candle-grease congealed, dark-streaked with
wick soot . . .
The smashed thumb-nail
Of that ancient mangled thumb was puckered
pearl,

Rucked quartz, a littered Cumae.
In the first house where I saw electric light,
She sat with her fur-lined felt slippers
unzipped,

Year in, year out, in the same chair, and
whispered
In a voice that at its loudest did nothing else
But whisper. We were both desperate

The night I was left to stay, when I wept
and wept
Under the clothes, under the waste of light
Left turned on in the bedroom. "What ails
you, child,

What ails you, for God's sake?"

This is told without fuss, the way it needs to be told—Heaney knows, seems to sense intuitively, the way to tell a poem. We forget that our sympathies must be invented, not merely elicited.

Heaney loves to write about being a poet, a subject almost poisonous to poetry. There are elegies for Ted Hughes, Zbigniew Herbert, Joseph Brodsky, and many another. There's an embarrassing duet with Virgil (even the idea is self-flattering), as well as a low-temperature translation of the ninth eclogue, where an old songster passes his songs, a little grumpily, to a younger (more self-flattery). After the poems on reading, on a bookcase, on the day-to-day life of the poet, which seems to involve lots of travel to poetic places for poetic reasons, you're glad for the homeliest act of observation, for the small catechism of tailoring a suit. If some of these late poems are amateurish, it's good to see the amateur Heaney again, rather than the tweedy professional.

Heaney lives in the split allegiance of his vowels. His side-slanting dialect, with its *coolth* and *delph* and *oxter-rigged*, its *stour* and *glarry* and *tetter-barked*, gives English back its Anglo-Saxon burr (it's not without irony that he draws a line from Grendel's attack on Heorot to the IRA). Heaney is still our great poet of the dumb constancy of nature.

Perch on their water-perch hung in the clear
Bann River
Near the clay bank in alder-dapple and waver,

Perch we called "grunts," little flood-slubs,
runty and ready,
I saw and I see in the river's glorified body

That is passable through; but they're bluntly
holding the pass,
Under the water-roof, over the bottom,
adoze,

Guzzling the current, against it, all muscle
and slur
In the finland of perch, the fenland of alder,
on air

That is water, on carpets of Bann stream, on
hold
In the everything flows and steady go of the
world.

We have seen some of these poems before, and will no doubt see some again (repetition is the act of homage a poet pays himself). In Heaney the sense of déjà vu is very close to the condition of fate. If he can be a bit much, far too many poets are a bit little. *Electric Light* is an interim book, but Heaney's books have always seemed betwixt and between—he's the most shapeshifting of our contemporaries, wily as a snake (of which there are still none in Ireland). Heaney is only the latest, and not the last, of a line of Irishmen who have blessed the language that estranges them from the Celtic past, of Wilde and Shaw and Yeats and Joyce and Beckett, a line as long as Banquo's heirs.

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Books

Reconciling nature & the machine

by Mildred Schmertz

The eminent Victorian Frank Furness (1839–1912) was the first great American architect after Thomas Jefferson and the first to design buildings that could, in any sense, be called original. Jefferson's Greek Revival buildings were academically correct, but Furness rejected eclecticism's almost obligatory requirement that historic form and ornament be copied and adapted literally. His best buildings are a synthesis of classical and Gothic architecture, with decorative elements adapted from many sources, and have little in common with the historically precise buildings of American Gothic Revivalists like Richard Upjohn, James Renwick, or Andrew Jackson Downing.

Furness's work was adapted to the challenges of the newly industrialized life of his time. He learned much from the writings and drawings of the French architect, scholar, and restorer Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–79), best-known for his restorations of Notre Dame and Sainte Chapelle in Paris. Viollet-le-Duc presented Gothic construction as a rational system fully applicable to the new technology; his concepts guided Furness's own engineering advances and techniques. What most distinguished Furness's work from that of his contemporaries, however, was the boldness with which he distorted forms and mixed historical sources in ways that invested his buildings with personal emotion and conflict.

Furness's career lasted twenty-six years, but toward the end his commissions were fewer and not so important because Victorian Gothic architecture had gone out of style, replaced by the McKim, Mead & White version of classicism. Critical neglect lasted long after his death. When the architectural historians referred to Furness at all it was to note that in 1873 he had hired the sixteen-year-old Louis Sullivan, only to soon let him go because of the nationwide financial panic. In *The Brown Decades* (1935), a study of the arts of America in the last three decades of the nineteenth-century, Lewis Mumford gave Sullivan his due, but summed up Furness in a single sentence as "the designer of a bold, unabashed, ugly, and yet somehow healthily pregnant architecture." Champions of Furness's work began to appear by the 1960s. In *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), the architect Robert Venturi included two Furness buildings, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and the demolished National Bank of the Republic among over two-hundred works of architecture that embody the qualities that the book's title affirms. Vincent Scully in *American Architecture and Urbanism* (1969) called Furness "a man of the 1870's, the strongest and bravest."

Michael J. Lewis in his brilliantly conceived and uncommonly well-written *Frank Furness: Architecture and the Violent Mind*[1] is the first architectural historian to bring me-

1 *Frank Furness: Architecture and the Violent Mind*, Michael J. Lewis; W. W. Norton, 352 pages, $45.

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ticulous research and broad cultural and psychological interpretation to the life of Furness. By weaving the history of the country itself into the life of the man and the making of buildings, he has created an absorbing portrait of the American Victorian world. Throughout his book, he tells how one after another of Furness's buildings came to be. He unsparingly reveals Furness's relentless, and sometimes ruthless, political and social maneuvering to get work and his dumping of two successive partners when they impeded his progress. He was as tough as his clients—the banking executives, railroad moguls, and industrialists who more often than not gave him his way.

Lewis suggests that Furness's mind was not only tough but also violent, and offers more than the troubled genius's brooding, conflicted, and domineering architecture as evidence. He reveals the teenage Frank as

> surly and truculent . . . [traits that hinted] at more persistent and pernicious discontents. Whether these signs are labeled as raving and melancholy, in the words of his generation, or mania and depression in the words of ours, virtually all intimate accounts of Frank draw attention to the ferocity of his temper and to his self-destructive nature.

From his youth to the age of forty, Furness suffered periodic bouts of mental illness involving loss of appetite, nervousness, and excessive agitation. By age fifty these problems were chronic. Ill or comparatively well, he also possessed an ungovernable temper that expressed an immense ego.

Furness had inherited this fragility of temperament from his father, but William Henry Furness (1802–1896) also bestowed upon his son a legacy of great cultural and intellectual distinction. He had been born into an old and prominent New England Puritan family. He knew Ralph Waldo Emerson from childhood, and the two were at Harvard at the same time. After becoming a doctor of divinity, he took over the Unitarian congregation in Philadelphia. A connoisseur of architecture, it was he who chose William Strickland to build for his expanding congregation the Greek Revival First Unitarian Church, completed in 1828 but demolished in 1885. Strickland, one of the most distinguished architects of his era, had built Philadelphia's Second Bank of the United States, a still extant Greek Revival masterpiece completed in 1824.

The senior Furness also practiced many arts. He drew, wrote literary criticism, translated German verse, composed the occasional hymn, and wrote a series of books introducing to American Protestant theology the concept of Jesus as an historical figure rather than a divine one. Furness attracted Philadelphia's scientific and literary intellectuals to his home and church, while Emerson, William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Sumner, and Lucretia Mott would come down from Boston to urge him to participate actively in the abolitionist movement.

Young Furness was supposed to follow his father and brother Horace to Harvard, but as the time approached he refused to go. Emerson, knowing of Frank's unhappiness, tried to interest him in nature and art by giving him a stereoscope through which to look at three-dimensional images of landscape and architecture. "With this kindly gesture," Lewis writes, "Emerson opened for Furness the same window onto the universe that he celebrated in his famous essay 'On Nature,' the most exquisite statement of New England transcendentalism, the belief that the entire natural world is the physical manifestation of the Godhead." Lewis points out that Furness really didn't need Emerson to help him discover architecture. It was going on all around him in Philadelphia, and, given his father's interest, in the air at home.

Furness chose to study architecture and thereby avoided Harvard. In the United States at that time there were no architectural schools, and training in the profession was by means of apprenticeships, private drawing schools, reading, and travel. The Reverend Furness placed his then sixteen-year-old son as a pupil in the architectural office of the Philadelphia architect John

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Fraser (1825–1906). Because there were no blueprint machines, his work as a junior draftsman must have consisted mainly of reproducing drawings by tracing, copying letters, and writing specifications. Later he would have progressed to working drawings, but actual design was the prerogative of the office principals—plainly a dull place for young Furness.

Early on, through his brother Willy, a painter, he had the good fortune to meet Richard Morris Hunt (1827–95), just back from ten years in Paris and the first American architect ever to have studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. "Hunt," Lewis explains, "offered a tantalizing gift of what architecture could be, if handled as an act of imagination, and practiced with one's whole spirit and being." Of Hunt, Furness wrote:

> Never shall I forget the enthusiastic alacrity with which, in describing some object—I think [it] was a weather cock, on a European cathedral—he seized a piece of paper, and with a pencil from his pocket, made one of those wonderful "cobweb" sketches as he called them—not one useless stroke, every line had its meanings and due emphasis, and dashed off with such unerring foreknowledge! I had never imagined that there could be such drawing.

In 1858 the Reverend Furness asked Hunt to take Frank as a pupil in his New York atelier where he had begun to teach architecture using the methods of the Beaux-Arts system. Hunt also practiced architecture in an office separate from the school. In 1860 Furness was invited by Hunt to manage the office, and he formed his plans. He would work for Hunt to learn from a true master, sail to Paris to study, and then return to America and establish his practice. But there was to be no formal education in Paris for Furness; he fought in the Civil War instead.

For the Furness family, abolition was a holy calling and the Civil War a holy war. Of the Reverend Furness's three sons, only Frank went to battle to uphold his father's cause, because Horace was deaf and Willy had a wife and child. With war coming and building at a standstill, Hunt had closed his office, married, and decamped to France for a long honeymoon just as the first shots fell upon Fort Sumter. Furness returned to Philadelphia and joined an elite volunteer cavalry regiment known as Rush's Lancers founded by the West Pointer and Mexican War veteran Richard Henry Rush. He equipped himself with two horses, a saber, and a pistol and was handed a lance to carry instead of a rifle and bayonet, the latter being in short supply. Furness was inspired by the folly of the lance to make a cartoon with the following caption: "A cavalryman with a saber rode into a charge and pierced one foe and carried him off in triumph on his sword, but a lancer rode in by his side, and transfixed half a dozen foes, and bore them off on his lance, gaily." Mounted on handsome horses with lances raised, the volunteers were nothing if not picturesque and became immortal through a famous sketch by Winslow Homer.

Rush's Lancers on their arrival at Hampton Roads in 1862 passed the ironclads *Monitor* and *Merrimack* about to duel for the second time. Lewis boldly suggests that for Furness they were to become a source of architectural form.

> If there were any visual memory from the entire war whose essence is preserved in Furness's buildings, it was this one: turreted iron-plated machines, living mechanical instruments whose form was shaped by the neutral principles of statics and physics. Furness's lumbering banks might derive their details from Gothic aedicules, but in their sense of implied motion, of living mass and bulk, they had more in common with the *Monitor* than perhaps any architectural monument in history.

Although his horse was shot from under him in one of the battles of the Wilderness Campaign, he rose from the ground, uninjured. He similarly lost two more horses, but survived the war without a wound.

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Furness even once risked his life to save a Confederate soldier by entering no man's land to apply a tourniquet to the man's bleeding leg. On his way back he heard the Confederate call out, "You may be a Yankee, but, by Gad, you are a gentleman." Late in his life Furness placed a note in Southern newspapers to find the man if he still lived. The search was successful, and the two met again in Philadelphia in 1905. Lewis's superbly illustrated book includes a photograph of the aged pair, shaking hands. In 1899 Furness was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, for bravery under fire in 1864 at Trevilian Station.

At the end of the war, the twenty-five-year old Furness returned to Philadelphia to marry and begin his practice. Lewis does not believe that his experience of battle expressed itself in his work: "Already he had a sense of physical heft and convulsive collision at a time when he had not yet heard a shot fired in anger or seen a drop of blood (although his childhood was laden with a looming sense of anti-abolitionist violence). The Civil War did not generate this sensibility, though it certainly acted to intensify it." Lewis perceives Furness's battlefield experience as a different kind of architectural apprenticeship.

> He had organized encampments, thrown together bulwarks and entrenchments, made log redoubts. In addition he had been exposed to planning logistics, troop movements, a kind of highly abstract architectural experience. But the principal architectural lesson of the war had more to do with the style of the man than the style of his buildings. Now he could "wage architecture," running at top speed, damning all dangers and whatever criticism was fired at him. His sprint under fire at Trevilian Station was the primal event of his life; from it he learned that the bold and unexpected was likely to meet with success, and that, in some way, he was charmed and thereby immune to danger. In short, he brought to his profession the heightened awareness and bold initiative of the combat veteran.

The practical and manly engineering and planning skills that Furness mastered, the confidence gained, and the good fortune of his survival intact from a brutal war, made it possible for him to bring forth such masterpieces as the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Provident Life and Trust Building, and the University of Pennsylvania Library. But as Lewis writes, "Furness's narcissism was also a fundamental ingredient of his architecture . . . each building acting as a kind of safety valve, draining out the excess agitation and turbulence, whatever its cause, that continued to bubble up from within Furness's restless soul." His buildings are perceived by Lewis as more than original expressions of style. For him, they are intellectual creations and represent the first great attempt by an architect to reconcile the world of nature and the world of the machine. In his epilogue, Lewis concludes: "Here is the theme of his life: while the builders of his utilitarian, materialist age tried to subject nature to mechanistic principles, Furness turned the process around and, like Walt Whitman, looked for the poetry in the vital forces of the modern age, and sought the flower in the machine."

Induction rules

James Franklin
The Science of Conjecture:
Evidence and Probability Before Pascal.
Johns Hopkins University Press,
485 pages, $55

reviewed by John Derbyshire

What do we know, and how surely do we know it? The general answer was given by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: certainty can be found only in mathematics, all other knowledge being to some degree doubtful. Much evil has been let loose upon the world by defiance of, or exaggeration of, this simple truth: at the one extreme by the belief that absolute certainty can be found

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in non-mathematical dogmas, at the other by the vulgar conclusion that since certainty is not possible outside mathematics (nor even inside it, according to a few bold theorists), everything we think we know is really just a set of epiphenomenal delusions arising from our personal and social circumstances. The natural fruit of the first of these errors is obscurantist tyranny; of the second, that mendacious solipsism Americans have come to know so intimately well, according to which, since nothing can be known, language has no content and no purpose but the manipulation of the world for the gratification of our private appetites. We shall eventually find out, since it has colonized a large part of our academic life and seems still to be increasing its hold on the minds of the intelligent young, whether that second folly has any worse mischief to unload on us than the indignities we suffered during the 42nd Presidency.

Aristotle's observation implies that most of what we can hope to know must emerge from the weighing of probabilities. To what branch of human knowledge does this weighing of probabilities, this "science of conjecture," as James Franklin calls it, itself belong? Without thinking very much, most of us moderns would make a paradox of the whole thing by replying: "to mathematics". The fact that we can give this answer at all, and be partly right in giving it, is a wonderful thing in itself, almost a miracle. That mathematics, our only stock of certain knowledge, can be used with great precision to tell us useful things about the uncertain majority of human experience, is astounding. It poses, in fact, deep philosophical questions to which convincing answers are in short supply. In mathematical statistics, for example, there is an entity named the Poisson distribution, used for estimating the occurrence of rare events. It was first derived in 1837 by the French mathematician Siméon-Denis Poisson from a study of deaths by horse kicks in the Prussian army. It turns out that if you list the number of cavalry corps in which there were no deaths, one death, two deaths, three deaths, . . . the numbers you have listed follow an elegant mathematical formula. When I first encountered this in my studies, I easily mastered the math but got stuck on the metaphysical question: *How did the horses know when to stop kicking?* I have still not seen any answer that leaves me entirely satisfied.

The first significant results in the mathematical theory of probability were given to us by Pierre Fermat and Blaise Pascal, who developed the fundamental principles in a sequence of letters in 1654 while discussing two problems posed by the Chevalier de Méré, a professional gambler. (The problems were how to divide the stakes of an unfinished game of chance between two players when one of them is ahead and how to quantify the odds in dice-throwing.) In *The Science of Conjecture*, James Franklin has set out to provide a full account of all non-mathematical approaches to probabilistic reasoning prior to that *annus mirabilis* and also, in a brief but very useful epilogue, to summarize subsequent non-mathematical developments. He has embraced a very wide field of inquiry indeed, taking in practically all the major intellectual disciplines and pseudo-disciplines, from medicine to moral theology, from rhetoric to astrology. He begins with Bishop Butler's phrase: "Probability is the very guide of life." He ends with a stirring, and very timely, defense of rational judgment against "the forces of unreason" that are on the loose in our academies.

The author reminds us that premodern thinkers had a keen grasp of the "science of conjecture" long before that science was quantified. Lawyers were specially skillful at weighing, and displaying, probabilities in a convincing way. Charged with having spoken against the supremacy of his king in matters religious, Sir Thomas More was confronted with just one witness, an inveterate liar by reputation. He dealt with that witness's testimony thus:

> Can it therefore seem likely vnto your honorable Lordshipps that I wold, in so weyghty a

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> cause, so unadvisedly overshoote myself as to trust master Rich, a man of me alwaies reputed for one of so litle truth . . . that I wold vnto him vtter the secreates of my consciens towchinge the Kings supremacye? . . . A thinge which I neuer wold, after the statute thereof made, reveale either to the kings highnes himself, or to any of his honorable councellours. . . . Can this in your iudgments, my lordes, seeme likely to be true?

Under the circumstances, it was not in the least likely—though, alas, Sir Thomas went to the block anyway.

The weighing of evidence in courtrooms is, of course, still conducted today—a good illustration of the fact that non-mathematical reasoning about probabilities did not stop abruptly in 1654 and is in fact never likely to stop. Even in our own extremely mathematical age, such methods still form much the larger part of probabilistic thinking and arguing. Even in areas where the matters under discussion are of a strictly scientific nature, and in theory quantifiable, the mathematical calculus of probability is often of very little help: think of meteorology. Franklin notes in passing, as many others have done, that mathematics herself, though her truths must always be demonstrated deductively, most often advances by induction and intuition. *This function behaves like this here . . . and here . . . and here. Perhaps it behaves like this everywhere! Let's see if I can construct a deductive proof.* . . In an analogy I like very much, the sociologist Erving Goffman speaks of the "front" and the "back" of intellectual work, comparing such work to what goes on in a theater or a restaurant, where the smooth, disciplined, orderly "front" for presentation to the public is supported by a noisy, chaotic "back," where professionals prepare the dishes or don the costumes amid much yelling and banging and breakage.

The converse is also true. Just as the post-Pascalian world is rich in unquantified and unquantifiable reasoning about probability, so, it turns out, the ancient and medieval worlds were by no means innocent of numerical methods for dealing with chance. Gamblers—at any rate, successful gamblers—must always have had some notion of "odds." We know that they did, for related terms escaped into ordinary language: "vernacular quantification," Franklin calls it, and quotes passages like Sir Andrew Aguecheek's "it's four to one she'll none of me" from *Twelfth Night*. More surprising, at any rate to me, is Franklin's account of the medieval trade in annuities, in which "[m]onasteries were among the principal sellers . . . and churchmen common among the buyers." It was all squared with the church's prohibitions of usury by dint of some ingenious reasoning, notably Alexander Lombard's *Treatise on Usury* of 1307. Lombard's main point: the contract is illicit only when one party has notably the better side. If the right price can be found, given the probabilities, then no wrong has been done. Franklin presents these topics in a chapter headed "Aleatory Contracts: Insurance, Annuities and Bets," the best part of the book, for my money. I was also surprised to learn that the first English state lottery was organized as early as 1566. "The public showed a certain skepticism about the government's honesty," Franklin notes drily, and only 34,000 of the 400,000 tickets were sold. Apparently it was not only in their appreciation of drama that the Elizabethan public was more sophisticated than ourselves.

This is not always an easy book to read; it is dense and sometimes quite difficult, though easier towards the end than at the beginning. I am not sure that Franklin found the best method of organizing his material; however, this is not a very constructive criticism because I don't see how a net cast so wide could have failed to bring in such a multifarious catch. Fortunately, Franklin's style is clear and fluent, with an occasional sly Gibbonian aside to make the reader chuckle. Of the Jacobean jurist Sir Edward Coke's argument that "the Judge ought to be . . . for the party indifferent," Franklin observes, "The Jesuits no doubt

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remained skeptical of the 'indifference' of English judges, especially those Jesuits personally tortured by Coke."

Trail of blood

Ryszard Kapuscinski
The Shadow of the Sun.
Alfred A. Knopf, 325 pages, $25

reviewed by Jeffrey Meyers

Joseph Conrad believed that Catholic, Western-oriented Poland was historically destined to be a mediator between the civilization of Europe and the barbaric hordes of Asiatic Russia. In a similar fashion, the Polish-born Ryszard Kapuscinski is ideally suited to mediate between the First World of the West and the Third World countries of Africa. Free from colonial guilt and contrition, he told his African friends: "You were colonized? We, Poles, were also! For one hundred and thirty years [1772–1918] we were the colony of three foreign powers. White ones, too."

Like a hunter pursuing a wounded animal, he has followed the trail of blood through Africa. Frequently risking death, he's attacked by giant roaches; is threatened by a cobra that can't be crushed by a huge, sharp canister; suffers tuberculosis and cerebral malaria; is ambushed in northern Uganda; and nearly perishes of thirst when his truck breaks down in the Mauritanian desert. Like Walt Whitman, he can say: "I am the man, I suffered, I was there."

Kapuscinski explains that "the epoch of the fifties and sixties [was] full of promise and hope." But in the mid-Seventies Africa "entered its two darkest decades. Civil wars, revolts, coups d'état, massacres, and hunger" ravaged and destroyed the continent. In 1964, on the first of my three trips to Africa during that optimistic decade, Africans were friendly rather than hostile to whites, the colonial infrastructure had not decayed, cities were safe, wildlife was protected. Islam was quiescent rather than fanatical, AIDS didn't exist, corruption and genocide were not yet pandemic. I remember the dry palm leaves flapping in the breeze like buzzards' wings; the soft pumping handshakes; the outsize bottles of Tusker beer; the smell of rotten fruit, burnt oil, pungent sweat, and red earth; the vultures squatting on corrugated iron roofs; the piles of dead dogs on the beach; the Edenic gardens of the English settlers; the eyes of hyenas reflecting the headlights of cars.

Airports were small, officials engaging rather than rapacious, and when catching a plane you could drive right on to the runway and clamber up the metal stairs. Hitchhiking around East Africa, I sometimes waited half an hour for the first car to appear, but I was always picked up and often given hospitality by farmers and soldiers. Undesirable cabinet ministers were occasionally thrown out of airplanes, but political leaders like Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Kenyatta were at least more statesmanlike than their monstrous successors: Bokassa, Mobutu, and Amin, who fed his enemies to the crocodiles. For all its faults, British colonialism, by providing medicine, education, administration, transport, and industry did a great deal of good in Africa.

In his previous books Kapuscinski zeroed in on the wars and revolutions in Iran, Ethiopia, the Soviet Union, and Angola. Written for Polish newspapers over a period of forty years, this book is more elegiac in tone. A loosely structured collection of dispatches, in neither chronological nor geographical order, it needs a map and a table of contents. In one of the early pieces he describes traditional village life in the Ashanti kingdoms of Ghana as if it were like Edward Hicks's painting *The Peaceable Kingdom*. He ignores the well-documented practice of human sacrifice and cannibalism, and states: "They are closely attached to their extremely rich history, their traditions, beliefs, and laws." But this idealized Africa is soon replaced by a horrific and more realistic vision of "hunger; skeletal children; dry, cracked earth; urban slums; massacres; AIDS; throngs of refugees . . . rivers slowly

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drying up, thinning forests, sick, monstrous cities."

Writing, as it were, in slippers rather than combat boots, Kapuscinski offers too much potted history and is repetitive about the flaming heat, gigantic insects, and back-breaking roads, the poverty, squalor, and hopeless desperation. For an old Africa hand, he makes a surprising number of errors. The marauding bands in Ethiopia are called "shiftas" (not "shifts"). The Berlin Conference, which divided Africa among the European powers, took place ten (not eight) years before 1894. He says the Sultans of Zanzibar were descended from the Arabs of Oman, on the Arabian Sea; then contradicts this by stating that they came from the Persian Gulf. He doesn't know why these Arabs built their towns "in such a cramped and crowded fashion, why they pressed together this way, practically one atop another." The reason, clearly, was to provide the maximum amount of shade. African ships never carried slaves to Europe, and slavery did not end in the Sudan and in the Nigerian sultanates in 1936, but has continued until today.

Kapuscinski loses his bearings when discussing elephants and man-eating lions. Elephants—who can be killed by disease, by fights with their kind, and by hunters and poachers—do not die "only a natural death." And if lions roared, instead of creeping stealthily, they'd frighten away their prey. He claims the lions started to attack (no reason given) the Hindu laborers who were building the Mombasa to Kampala railway and that "No one protected these people, and they didn't have their own guns." In fact, as J. H. Patterson pointed out in his classic *Man-Eaters of Tsavo* (1907), the Parsee (not Hindu) coolies, following the traditions of the Towers of Silence in Bombay, left the bodies of their dead out in the open to be picked clean by the vultures. But the lions of Tsavo ate them first, developed a taste for human flesh and devoured twenty-eight workers before being shot by Colonel Patterson.

The Shadow of the Sun lacks the drama and urgency of his earlier books, but is well worth reading for its unflinching vision—like Naipaul's in *A Bend in the River* (1979)—of the awful reality of Africa. In "Marrakech," Orwell remarked that in the tropics "people with brown skins are next door to invisible." Kapuscinski takes the individual out of the undifferentiated mass, brings him to life, and makes you see him. His descriptions of genocide in Rwanda, coups in Zanzibar and Nigeria, revolution in Ethiopia are masterful.

Kapuscinski observes that many wars in Africa are

> waged without witnesses, secretively, in unreachable places, in silence, without the world's knowledge, or even the slightest attention. . . . History in these parts appears suddenly, descends like a deus ex machina, reaps its bloody harvest, seizes its prey, and disappears.

Blinded by ideologies that were disastrous in other countries, the fanatical dictators drove their countries to ruin: "When Tirana broke with Beijing, in Addis Ababa Ethiopian pro-Hoxha activists shot at Ethiopian Maoists. For months, the streets of the city flowed with blood."

The real problem is that most of Africa's intellectuals have been driven into exile. The people who remain are the illiterate downtrodden masses at the bottom and the crazed soldiers at the top. Kapuscinski shows why the masses, who have nothing to lose, support revolution but are quickly disenchanted. His great theme is the revolution betrayed: "the poverty and disillusion of those on the bottom rungs, coupled with the cupidity and gluttony of those on top, create a poisoned, unstable atmosphere, which the army senses; presenting itself as the champion of the injured and the humiliated, it emerges from the barracks, reaches for power"—and, like the pigs in *Animal Farm*, extinguishes all hope by replacing the old with a new oppression.

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Notebook

"The grisly science of embryo cloning"

by Jenny Teichman

An article by Roger Highfield, the science correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, appeared under this headline in London's *Week* in August 2000. Highfield described how recent authors distinguish between *reproductive cloning*, in which a new animal or human being is created from one "parent," and *therapeutic cloning*, the purpose of which is regenerative therapy. Such therapy uses material taken from human embryos as therapeutic products in the (possible future) treatment of certain illnesses. The two-way classification is not accurate because both types of cloning are reproductive: it's just that in (so-called) therapeutic cloning a human being is created *in vitro* for the specific purpose, first, of experimentation, and secondly, if the research is successful, so that its tissues can be mined for use in medical treatments. In other words embryos will be created and then killed in order that other human beings can be cured of diseases. If the research is successful, thousands or millions of human embryos will be created and destroyed in order to produce medical products. The program both depends on and creates a deep contempt for (early) human life. Highfield's explanation of the technique of therapeutic cloning runs as follows:

> Regenerative therapy involves the harvesting of pluripotent or stem cells, that is, cells which can give rise to many different kinds of tissue. Such cells exist in embryos; adult stem cells, by contrast, normally only give rise to specialized tissues. Implanted pluripotent stem cells have been shown to regenerate a wide range of tissues including cardiac muscle and damaged nerves. But there is a serious obstacle: if a patient is given an organ grown from someone else's cells the organ is likely to be rejected. The proposed solution is to create cells from the patient himself. In theory this can be done in two ways. One method involves taking a cell from the patient and fusing it with a human egg emptied of its genetic material. The resulting embryo can then be "mined" for stem cells. There are two possible sources of the human eggs needed for this technique: they can be donated knowingly or unknowingly by adult women undergoing IVF treatment; or they could be taken from aborted female foetuses.
>
> The other method of creating cells from the patient himself would involve finding a way to "rewind" adult stem cells, converting them into pluripotent cells. That method would not involve the creation and destruction of human embryos.

Highfield reports that a problem has been encountered when attempting the first kind of regenerative therapy: embryonic stem cells don't always grow into the needed kind of tissue. Instead a special type of cancer develops, a mixture of gut, muscles, nerves, teeth, and facsimiles of legs and arms. In May 1996, the journal *Neurology* reported the case of a sufferer from Parkinson's dis-

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ease who died a year after having a foetal tissue transplant. An autopsy disclosed that a mixture of bone, skin, and hair tissue had filled the ventricles of his brain.

Cloning has already been globalized. In America, then-President Clinton issued a directive stating that it will be lawful for pharmaceutical companies and private research establishments to fund experiments carried out on human embryos provided that the only embryos used are "spares" left over from IVF treatments. For those "spares" are already destined for destruction. Mr. Clinton assumed that the creation of "excess embryos" in IVF is unavoidable. But it must surely be possible to fertilize one egg at a time, *in vitro* as well as in the womb. *The Washington Times* reported that the president asked his Health and Human Resources secretary, Ms. Donna Shalala, to check out the ethics of the situation and she told him the ethics is fine—no problem. Clinton dealt with what he took to be the nation's only fear relating to embryo research by promising that such research will not be funded by American taxpayers.

Australian national guidelines prevent scientists from creating embryo cells for clinical purposes though the matter is under review by a parliamentary enquiry. Meanwhile a team at Monash University, which according to *The Sydney Morning Herald* "has secured a large injection of private funding," is carrying out research on imported cells extracted from human embryos in Singapore.

In October 2000, the Berlin paper *Die Welt* reported that a group of Australian and American scientists announced that they had created a "bizarre creature" that was half human and half pig and had lived for several days. They are applying for a patent at the European patenting center in Munich in order to continue their experiments "for medical research purposes."

In Britain the government recently set up a committee of experts whose task it was to make recommendations about human cloning. The chairman, Dr. Liam Donaldson, is the British government's Chief Medical Officer. He described his committee as "The Expert Group." Its brief was:

> to undertake an assessment of the anticipated benefits of new areas of research using human embryos, the risks and the alternatives, and, in the light of the final assessment, to advise whether these new areas of research should be permitted.

The CMO and his Expert Group published their report in August 2000. It recommended that scientists be allowed to grow cells from cloned human embryos in order to regenerate diseased tissue in patients suffering from various illnesses. That method, they decided, was more promising than any of the alternatives. Human embryos would be grown in laboratories to the age of fourteen days and harvested for their stem cells. Any left over would have to be destroyed. The group also recommended that reproductive cloning should remain a criminal offense. They supported these recommendations unanimously. Parliament was to be allowed a free vote on the matter. Dr. Donaldson is reported as having said: "they must do the right thing." In January this year, MPs voted as Donaldson advised.

The *Washington Times* said, "Far from making the research methods more palatable to those who prefer to protect the lives of the unborn, [Mr. Clinton's] guidelines are a laughable attempt at ethics," adding "scientists have poor responses to their critics." In Australia, Dr. Greg Pike of the Southern Cross Bioethics Institute said that research on human embryos is both unnecessary and morally unacceptable. In Britain, Cardinal Winning said "We are talking about the cloning of human beings —not balls of cells but unborn children. . . 'therapeutic cloning' is the ultimate misnomer, for it actually means killing." The cardinal asked whether people really want to unlock this door into a world in which human beings are no longer valued as individuals but as vehicles for creating new medical products. However, Boris Johnson,

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the editor of the *Spectator* and a parliamentary candidate for the Tory party, supported the research:

> In this ethical balancing act the adult human being must come out on top. The embryo involved is a far cry from anything we could consider human. Never more than fourteen weeks old [a Freudian slip for fourteen days] it consists of about 100 cells and is smaller than the full stop at the end of this sentence.

He goes on:

> As for the objection that it means "treating human beings casually," I'm afraid there is nothing new in that. Of the 763,509 embryos created in IVF between 1991 and 1998, 184,000 were stored, 48,000 were used in research and 238,000 were destroyed.

Mr. Johnson doesn't say what happened to the other 293,509.

The issue of embryo research raises a number of questions that have nothing to do with the feasibility of techniques. Unlike the creation and destruction of a rag doll for a Guy Fawkes bonfire, the creation and destruction of human embryos is not a morally neutral matter.

Let us begin the next part of this discussion by considering the role of "slippery slope" arguments in reasonings about practical matters. After that, let's examine the meaning of the expression "playing God." Finally, and more fundamentally, we ought to try to decide whether morality has an absolute component or is merely a rubbery set of ever-changing dicta.

The setting up of advisory committees indicates that some governments at least do not wish scientists to have complete freedom in carrying out research on human embryos. It appears that those governments are either afraid of the possible effects on public opinion or recognize, however dimly, that the proposed research raises moral as well as purely technical questions.

Some of the people and organizations opposed to experimenting on human embryos condemn the practice outright because the research both depends on and creates a deep contempt for early human life. Others argue that it will produce a slippery slope leading to the legalization of practices which many ordinary citizens believe to be profoundly wrong. (Reproductive cloning of human beings is one such possibility.)

There isn't just one slippery slide here. The reports of advisory committees produce conjunctions of interlocking slopes each of which lends force to the others and which taken together, and on the evidence of what scientists themselves predict, might well produce a global avalanche quite soon. Abortion was legalized in Britain in 1967; a few years later two separate advisory committees (Peel in 1972, Polkinghorne in 1989) decided that the use of aborted fetal tissue as experimental material is desirable provided various guidelines are observed. Another two committees (Warnock in 1985, Donaldson in 2000) decided that experimenting on human embryos created *in vitro* is desirable, again providing guidelines are followed. The option of forbidding those researches altogether was never considered, largely, I suppose, because the committees of enquiry were set up after the research was already under way. Ignoring the option of a total ban altered the ethical landscape by steering the enquiries into simplistic discussions of medical utility and laboratory techniques. Ordinary empirical evidence indicates that legislation intended to control or restrict iffy practices can easily end up by silently condoning them. Abortion laws in America and Britain provide a striking example; reformers did not intend that abortion on demand be permitted but abortion on demand soon became the norm in both countries.

The decisions taken by Clinton and the British Parliament are sure to generate slippage. Firstly, because laws which attempt to guide or govern the activities of scientists are not easy to police. Can law enforcement agents stand about inside research estab-

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lishments counting the days since this or that cloned embryo was produced? Have the British controls ever resulted in scientists being questioned by the police? Not as far as I know. Secondly, there is strong evidence of future slippage in the forecasts and wishes of the scientific community. A few days after the Donaldson report on regenerative cloning was published, British scientists predicted that reproductive cloning is certain to follow.

Under the headline "Human Cloning is Now Inevitable," *The Independent* described its survey of scientific opinion on August 30, 2000. The paper asked thirty-two scientists for their views and reported as follows:

> Most of those who took part [in the survey] accepted that the successful use of cloned embryos in medical research would lead to a re-evaluation of the law banning reproductive cloning. . . . [M]ore than half thought that if technical and safety issues were overcome it was certain that reproductive cloning would be attempted within the next twenty years.

Peter Brinsden, the medical director of the Bourn Hall Clinic (which specializes in IVF treatment), was reported as saying, "Reproductive cloning for ethically approved indications would now be acceptable if properly explained."

The medical director of a London fertility clinic, who wished to remain anonymous, said "the equipment needed for cloning is simple and cheap, and whether it is approved or not it will happen. It is unstoppable." (It looks as if he won't let anyone stop *him*.) One biologist said "in time it will be done, though at first it might be camouflaged as just another method of assisting reproduction and called by some other name than cloning."

David Skuse, a geneticist at the Institute of Child Health in London, said:

> Once the technique for human reproductive cloning is technically feasible it will be done. What are now ethical boundaries will probably prove to be elastic in time.

Human beings are strongly tempted to infer that if some practice is already occurring it must be all right. If their inference was correct, it would follow that morality is completely elastic. Why? Because new things keep happening all the time.

One can see the temptation working in Boris Johnson, who says he is "afraid" that scientists are already experimenting on, and then destroying, thousands of human embryos and concludes that it must be all right to do so. Moreover, he takes it as evident that "the adult patients must come out on top." Presumably he thinks ten-year-old patients must come out about half-way down.

There is nothing new in Johnson's way of reasoning. The scientist Paul Ehrlich, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1908, tested various forms and various doses of his "Magic Bullet," Salvarsan, on prostitutes handed over to him by the police. That the prostitutes objected was neither here nor there—the cure of respectable young men suffering from syphilis "must come out on top." It is said that in the 1930s experiments were conducted, without their consent, on black prisoners in American jails; no doubt the experimenters argued that the health of law-abiding people "must come out on top." The merely scientific thinking behind all these practices is not irrational; after all, the very best experimental animal for testing treatments intended for human beings is another human being.

Donaldson's report does not ask any questions about ethics. Presumably the Expert Group either had no ideas about such matters or confusedly believed that research on human embryos must be all right because it is already happening. It is noticeable, too, that the Expert Group did not concern itself with public opinion. Perhaps the experts decided the public can go hang.

Donaldson's report is rather different in tone from the recommendations emanating from Mary Warnock's Committee of Enquiry into Embryology and Human Fertility (1985). Her committee contained in-

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dividuals working in several different areas of expertise and therefore tended to reflect public opinion (at least to some extent). Her report had two parts, one representing the views of the majority and the other of the minority. Of the sixteen people on the committee, seven voted against allowing experimentation on human embryos. Donaldson's Expert Group had no need to issue a minority report because the experts were unanimous in their recommendations. Indeed unanimity was virtually guaranteed by the constitution of the group. Its fourteen members were: two government officials, *viz* the CMO himself and the Chief Scientific Advisor; ten other scientists, some of whom were clinicians; one professor of medical ethics; and one law lecturer. Its conclusions reflected the opinions (and the wishes) of scientists already working in the field of embryo research and related areas.

The attitudes of the experimenters are well-expressed by the biologist Richard Dawkins. He supports his fellow scientists' research on human embryos by alleging that "talk about playing God has no place in any valid argument" and insisting that "people who object to research [on cloning] *must* explain exactly who would be harmed by it." (My italics. Dawkins and Donaldson are both too fond of the word "must.")

Richard Dawkins is the Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford, and as such he is a kind of one-man Saatchi and Saatchi. But unlike that well-known advertising firm he doesn't rely solely on boosting his own product; he also spends time knocking religion, which he wrongly imagines to be the only possible source of opposition to his views. His remark about playing God is a typical example. It should be noted that the remark is simply confused. Dawkins presumably thinks that since (in his view) God doesn't exist, all talk about playing God must be false or meaningless. This shows, to start with, that he doesn't know the difference between truth and meaning on the one hand and validity on the other. (Perhaps he ought to buy a logic primer.) It also shows that he doesn't realize that figures of speech have literal equivalents. "Playing God" is a figure of speech. When it is analyzed, the resulting propositions are perfectly capable of being true or false. As such they can certainly have a place in valid arguments, and, if true, in sound arguments as well. So let's analyze it.

God-players are control freaks. God created man and the other animals; control freaks want to do something similar. Lenin is a good example. He thought he could forge a new society by creating a new kind of human creature. His methods, of course, were rather crude, often consisting of shooting or incarcerating out-dated varieties of mankind. Lenin's near-contemporaries, Francis Galton, who was Charles Darwin's cousin, and Leonard Darwin, Charles's son, were also God-players. Galton founded the Eugenics Society after perpetrating some extremely jejune statistical arguments; Leonard Darwin was one of the society's earliest chairmen. Their aim was to help create new and better human beings by recommending that superior people be encouraged to breed (though as it happens both were childless) while inferior types be made to undergo sterilization. One disenchanted member of the Eugenics Society described it as "an unattractive collection of snobs and racists."

Some of today's God-players make batches of new human beings *in vitro* and then weed out all but the strongest. Others weed out those not needed for medical research. Dr. Cloner, God-player of circa 2020, will doubtless "explain" that reproductive cloning is "ethically indicated" for higher types like scientists and doctors and millionaires.

God-players are motivated by hubris. According to ancient legend, hubris leads to Nemesis. Nietzsche reaffirmed that view when he pointed out that scientific thinking is not reflective; it cannot ask, and so does not know, what limits ought to be placed on its own enquiries. But (said Nietzsche) unless limits are imposed and accepted "science will dig the grave of the human race."

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Hubris is the opposite of piety. It is a mixture of conceited overconfidence and insolent contempt.

All utilitarians, whether Benthamites or Millians or Dawkinsites, are overconfident. They have to be. They believe that future long-term and short-term harms and benefits can be successfully predicted and accurately weighed. This is foolish because the weightings given can only be arbitrary. It is also foolish because no one can say when "long-term" comes to an end. If dreadful harms appear on top of benefits, there is no wringing of utilitarian hands and no apologizing. What happens instead is that relatively short-term predictions are dropped in order to make way for ones which reach a little further into the future—and which will ultimately be replaced in their turn. If utilitarian theories were correct then morality would be as elastic as the ever-changing pseudocalculations which the theories make necessary.

Overconfidence, which is part of ordinary utilitarian armor, is indissolubly linked to the other main element of hubris, namely, an insolent contempt for "the gods." But what or who are "the gods"? In his book *Animal Rights and Wrongs*, Roger Scruton says (and rightly in my opinion) that piety need not presuppose the existence of supernatural beings. For Socrates, piety included respect for one's parents; for the Romans, it included respect for tradition. Piety, in short, is a kind of reverence for what is seriously important and has intrinsic (non-instrumental) value: human life, for example, and rights and justice and compassion and loyalty and beautiful animals and the environment—and the gods too, of course, if there are any.

Dawkins's other remark, that "people opposed [to cloning] *must* say exactly who they think will be harmed by it" (my italics, again) also needs looking at. To start with, it is a pretty obvious example of utilitarian over-confidence. Dawkins implies that accurate prediction is easy-peasy; so if his opponents are unable to say exactly who will be harmed that simply proves them to be a bunch of religious anti-scientific nitwits who deserve all the insolent contempt exhibited by the professor's rhetorical demand.

However, if scientists find prediction so easy, how come Professor Dawkins himself doesn't show us that in cloning harm is *impossible* or at the very least *highly unlikely*? Why does he suppose the onus of proof is on his opponents? Moreover, if opponents of cloning *must* say exactly who will be harmed, then surely Dawkins *must* say exactly who will benefit. In order to provide material for accurate calculations, his list of beneficiaries should be as complete as possible. He must not fail to remind us that behind every patient hoping for a cure there will be several well-paid biologists and geneticists; the benefits to them should not be overlooked. Dawkins mustn't forget President Clinton's directive, *viz*, that private companies are to spearhead embryo research; the benefits to shareholders should not be ignored. And he should not gloss over the fact that Geron-BioMed invests money in universities worldwide and has taken out patents on the human genome and on embryo stem cell techniques. He must not forget about the influence of greed on decision-making.

Destruction is harm. Killing is harm. Although Dawkins probably thinks an embryo is an It rather than a Who, there is no question but that embryos can be harmed. To destroy any living thing is to harm it. That a very small embryo feels no pain is neither here nor there; Dr. Shipman's murder victims felt no pain because he dispatched them with doses of morphia—but they were harmed all the same.

The aborted female foetuses mined for their eggs are harmed by the abortionist, not by the research scientist. The case is somewhat analagous to the situation in China where the bodies of executed criminals are mined by clinical scientists for transplant material. In both cases it could perhaps be said that the scientists themselves have been spiritually harmed by ben-

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efitting from the misfortunes of other human creatures.

The Reverend David Perry recently wrote in an English newspaper, "Richard Dawkins, for whom any mention of spirit or the spiritual is nonsense, is not competent to speak about human beings." Dawkins takes it for granted that nothing is wrong unless it causes material harm to human beings whose identity must be known "exactly." But just as there are spiritual things—for example, rights, justice, joy, sympathy, courage, decency, freedom, and pity—which are intrinsically good, so too there are spiritual evils which reasonable people know should be taboo. Absolute evils, whether material or spiritual, ought to be tabooed absolutely; it would be ludicrous and disgusting to set up "guidelines" for the practice of injustice or the reintroduction of slavery.

Thoughtful people understand that human beings can suffer serious harms that are not physical, not financial, and not merely emotional. Anyone who has been taught to think that mercy and courage and decency have no importance, that material benefits are the only things worth seeking, has been harmed as a human being.

Moral theory has to contain absolute components, it has to take note of intrinsic goods and intrinsic evils for otherwise it generates infinite regresses. Even Dawkins's utility calculus implicitly allows for one kind of intrinsic good, namely, the material benefit of (non-early) human beings. But that vision of good and evil is too narrow to sustain a rational moral theory.

The growth of widespread and insolent contempt for human life is a serious harm in itself. It also has harmful social consequences: for example, the pervasive criminality, seen in Russia and elsewhere, of Lenin's successors, Communists and capitalists alike.

And finally, not all wrongs are harms. Hubris, lack of piety, can easily do wrong without actually hurting anyone at all. To cut down a primeval forest (while taking care to plant new fast-growing trees which can be harvested to make cardboard containers for hamburgers) does not materially damage any specific human beings and might not even harm the environment. Nevertheless, destroying a beautiful irreplaceable work of nature is an evil thing to do.

On August 25, 2000, *The Catholic Herald* published an article about the Donaldson report written by Josephine Quintavelle. She described the style of Donaldson's document, and especially its repeated references to the Expert Group, as "an exercise in rank-pulling." Then she asked "Why had so many members [of the group] already endorsed therapeutic cloning, either by statement or by action, before the committee was convened?" (The answer, no doubt is: *That's the very reason why they were asked to serve on the committee!*)

The Expert Group claimed that embryo research is necessary because the alternatives remain "largely hypothetical." Less than a week after its recommendations were described in the newspapers, the journal *Science* reported that Drs. Toru Kondo and Martin Raff of University College London have shown that one type of adult brain cell can be converted back into neural stem cells. The stem cells thus converted could be used to treat stroke, Parkinson's Disease, and Alzheimer's, doing away with the supposed need to create and destroy human embryos. A couple of days after that, a news report in *The Daily Telegraph* (September 9, 2000) described the discovery of a vaccine made from a fragment of a protein. That vaccine, it is believed, will turn out to be a protection against Alzheimer's disease.

Those discoveries cannot have been made overnight. It is strange that no-one in the Expert Group had ever heard about the ongoing work of the people responsible.

Or perhaps some of them had . . .

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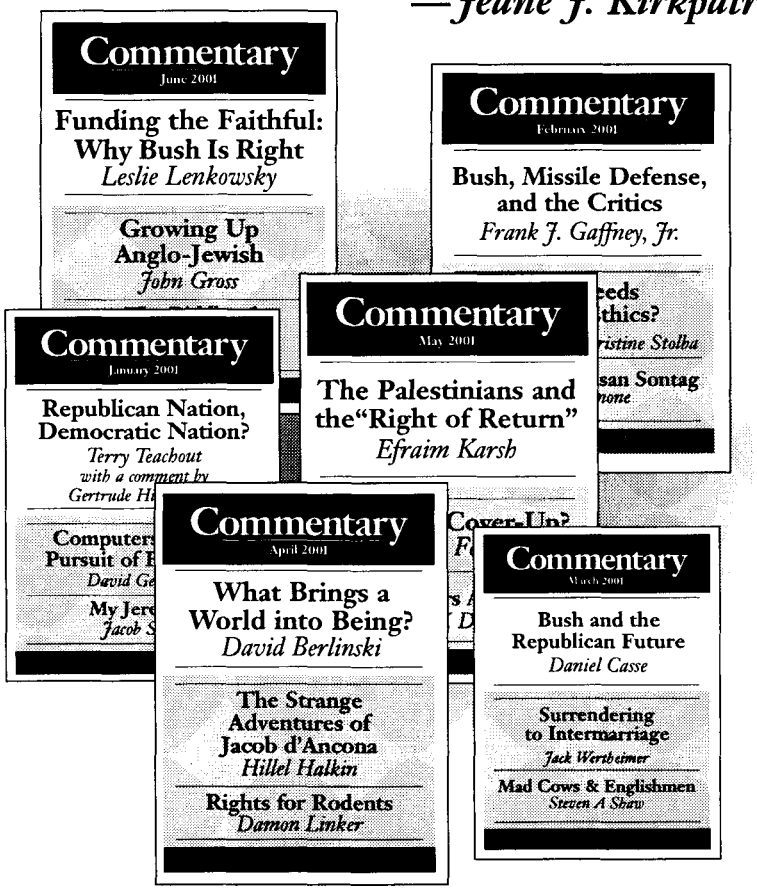

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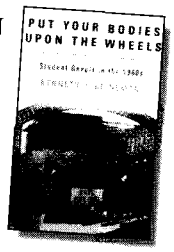

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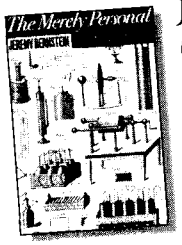

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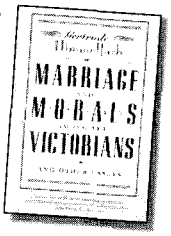

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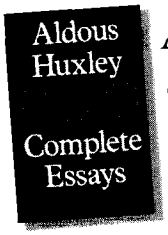

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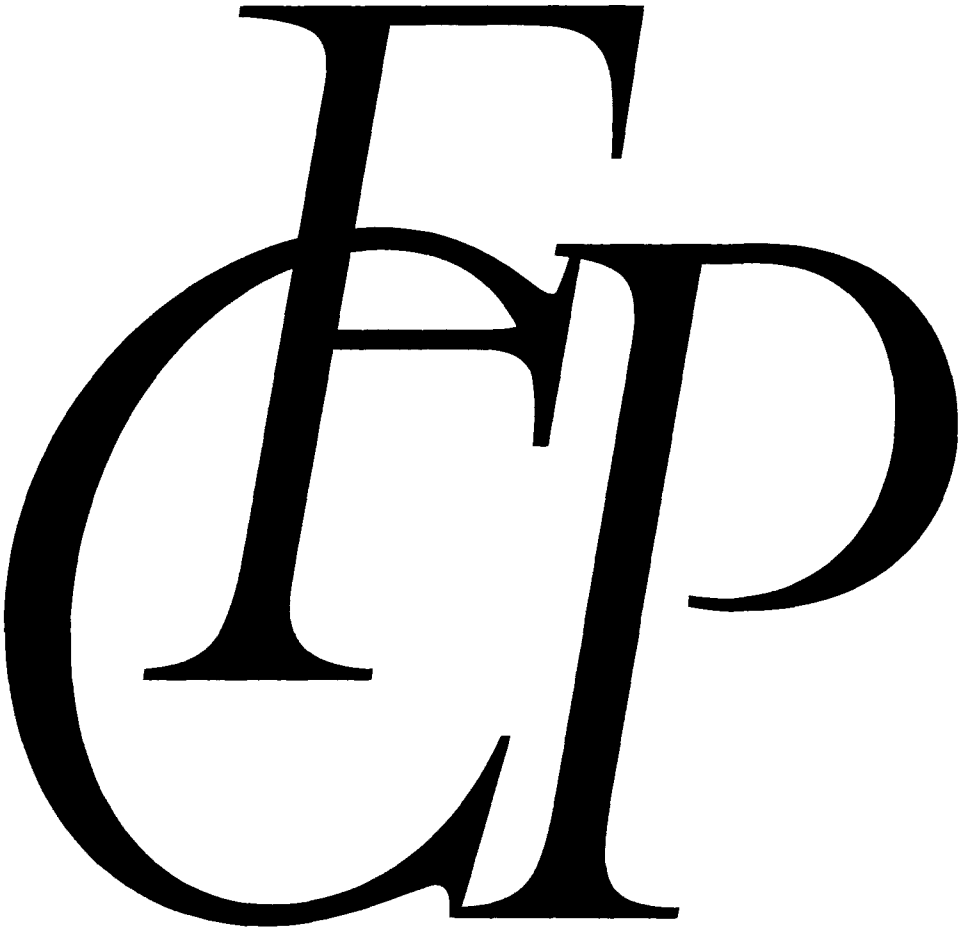

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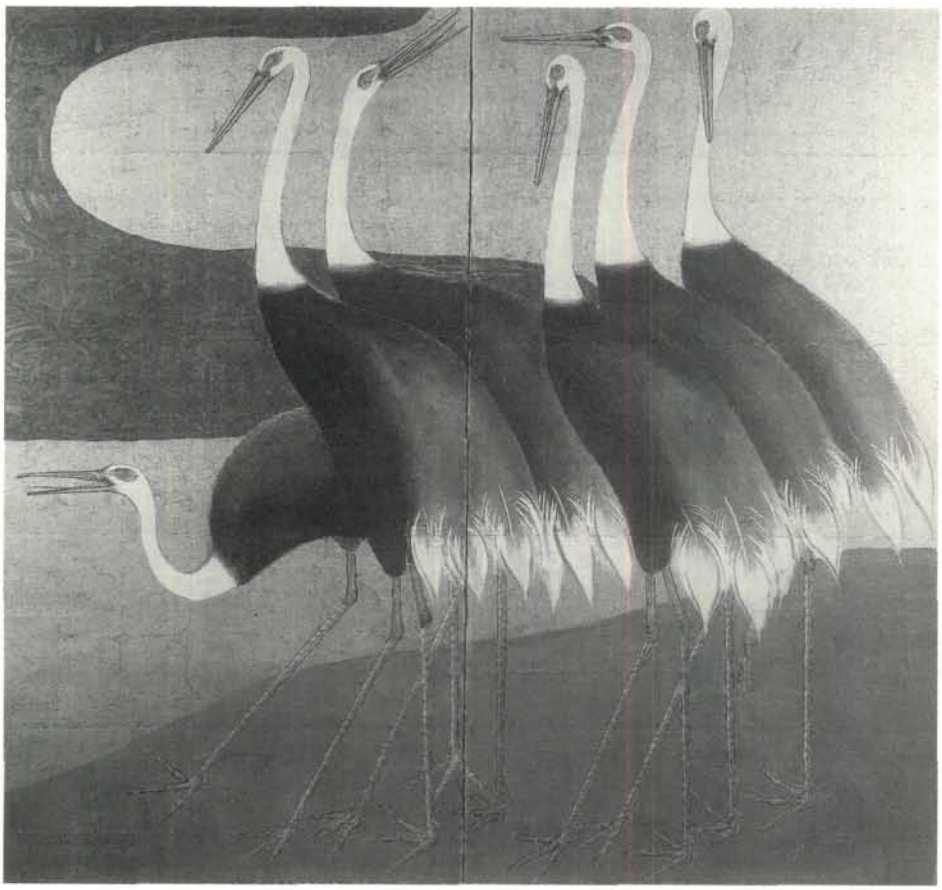

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